



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

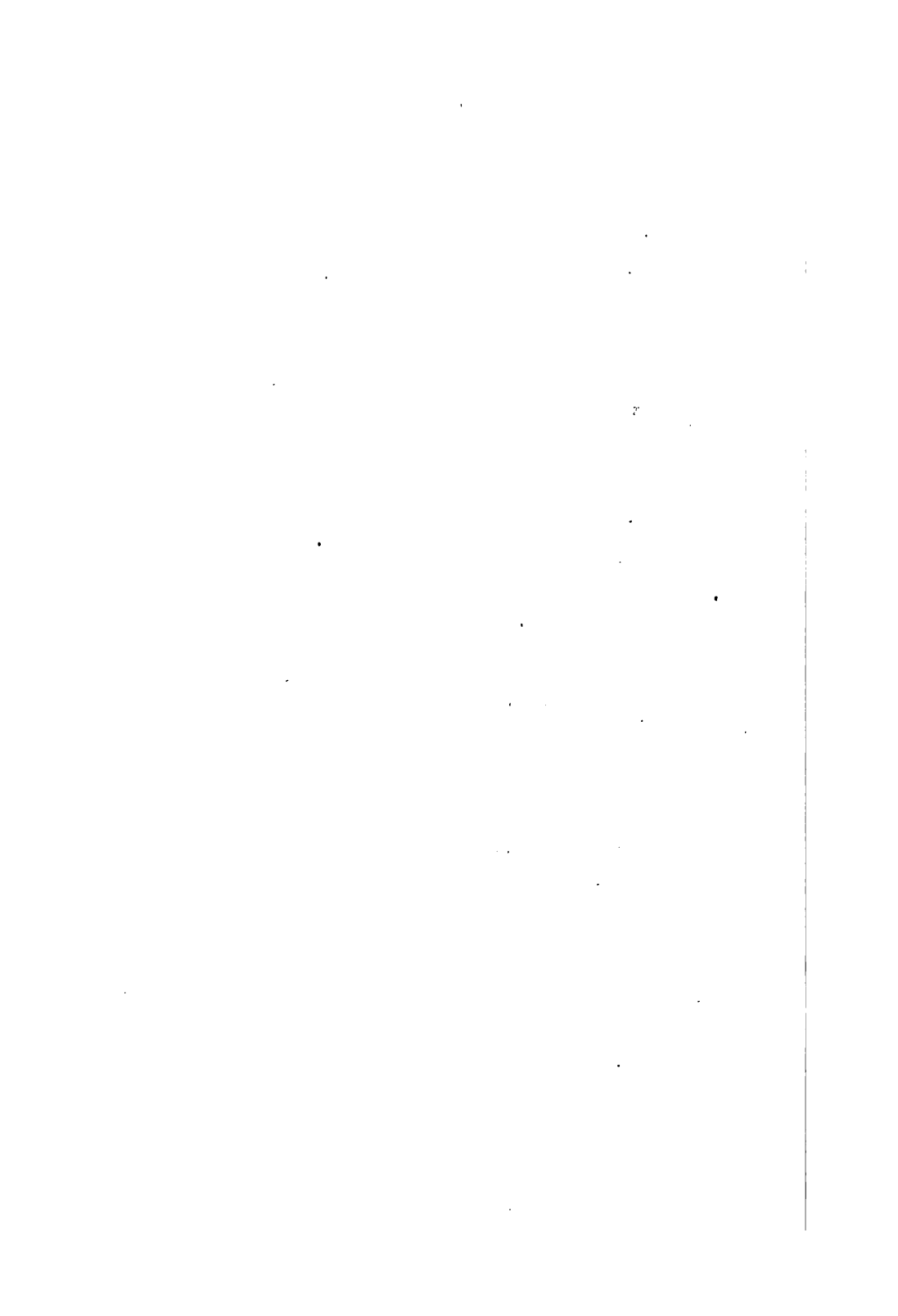




600071552Q

250. L. 28.





KATHERINE AND HER SISTERS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE,"

"THE TWO BROTHERS,"

&c., &c.

La Carità è paziente
È Benefica,
Non cerca il proprio interesse
Non si muove ad ira,
Non pensa male.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1861.

The right of Translation is reserved.

THE HISTORY OF THE

THE HISTORY OF THE
THE HISTORY OF THE
THE HISTORY OF THE
THE HISTORY OF THE
THE HISTORY OF THE

EDWARD BENHAM, PRINTER, COLCHESTER.



KATHERINE AND HER SISTERS.

CHAPTER XV.

"There is the calm of divine peace and joy; there is the calm of heartlessness; there is the calm of reckless desperation; there is the calm of death. None of these was the calm that breathed from the features of the stranger."

CALLISTA.

"I SAY, Betsy!" for thus, when excited, Mr. Frankland varied the more polished diminutive of his wife's name, "Hope's come!" and he burst into his wife's sitting-room on the following morning, too much astonished to exercise any circumlocution in his manner of telling the news.

"Come!" she exclaimed, putting down her book in an agitated manner. "Is it really true?"

"As true as I'm alive. I met Roper. His man went up this morning, to buy Mrs. Plumtre's cream, as usual, and came back with the news. Arrived last night. Mrs. P. completely taken by surprise."

"Come at last! Thirty years!" said Mrs. Frankland, still agitated. "And now it seems but a day."

"A pretty long day. A day that has brought me to the borders of three-score and ten. But it's true. I see him still, as the handsome, manly boy; too old, too wise for his years."

"When shall we see him?" Mrs. Frankland said, after a short pause. "I dread it. I dread that first meeting. I wish it was over."

"And why dread it, my good woman?" said Mr. Frankland, patting her shoulder, kindly. "Here we are, are we not, hale, and hearty, and happy? What matters thirty years to us?"

"Nothing, certainly, Ben. But agitation and excitement, that once were pleasant, are too much for me now. I dread the sight of him. Changed or unchanged, there must be a history in his thirty years; and, I often fear, a painful one. I hardly know what I expect. That young, bright face must long have passed away; and what history I shall read in those passionate dark eyes, I dread to think. But this is folly. When shall you go to him, Ben?"

"This moment. I will not lose an hour in giving him his welcome. Good-day.

Cheer up!" And, with another pat on her shoulder, he left the room.

Mrs. Frankland lay back in an agitated dream. There is a secret shadow, it is said, in most hearts; and Mrs. Frankland, though her life had been, on the whole, a happy and peaceful one, had a shadow, which even the lapse of thirty years of happy married life had not driven away. Like Hannah, she had no child; and though, like Elkanah, her husband had been more than ten sons to her, in his exclusive devotion, that secret care, unspoken even to him, had undermined her health, saddened her mind, and fastened a sting into her fancies. She strove with it, prayed against it; but in vain. Baffled for a time, calmed by thought, overlaid by holy reflections; still, even at sixty, the

wound festered, and had power, with sudden violence, to assail and torture her. At the time of Mr. Hope's departure, she had been full of hope; had already, in her vivid fancy, clasped a child in her longing arms. But the hope had vanished, like a vapour, never to return again. She would have been ashamed to confess to her husband—she was ashamed to allow to herself—how selfish a thought had caused, if not all, yet in part, her agitation on Mr. Hope's return. Yet, certainly, as slow tears coursed down her cheeks, the sorrow of *her* life was more present to her mind than the possible trials of his.

The door opened, the servant announced "Mr. Hope," and, more calmly than if a month only had parted them, the object of her many reflections entered the room once more.

They had shaken hands, and he had sat down, before any consciousness came; and when she endeavoured to speak and give him a kind of welcome, her lips trembled with agitation.

"I am afraid I have startled you," he said, in the same musical tones that had charmed his housekeeper ; but, however musical, they were so altered from the quick accents of youth, that, even more than the whitened hair, they distanced him from the image of her memory, and by that distancing composed her.

"It was not that," she said. "Come when you might, the length of time, the changes of years, the chances of mortal life"

"I have put them by," he said, interrupting her with a slight movement of

his hand. "Let the dead years be at rest."

She stared at him, totally unable to enter into or comprehend his mood or meaning.

"I am sorry I startled you," he began again. "I ought not to have done it; but I, too, dread these first meetings, and I hoped, by boldness, to subdue their power. I came to you because I could not rest till this first meeting was over. You were very kind to me in long past days, and the thoughts of kindness are too softening for this working world. Take my thanks," and he grasped her hand with an ardent pressure, "and now let us be still."

He crossed his hands on his knees; one lay at rest; with the other, which held his hat and stick, he listlessly

8 KATHERINE AND HER SISTERS.

struck the carpet, and so he sat for some moments in profound thought.

Mrs. Frankland watched him, unable to speak, her whole soul vibrating beneath the grasp of his hand. With that grasp recollection had returned again. In vain the softened voice, the whitened head; in the flash of his dark eyes she read of a nature but little changed since the old days living in her memory.

For the space of two or three minutes he sat in reflection. He then shook off the pensive mood, looked up, looked around, and smiled.

"You speak of the lapse of years, but I see no traces of them here. This room has been often present to my fancy, and I find it unchanged. By what secret power has it defied time?"

Mrs. Frankland roused herself, and taking her hint from him, answered in a playful tone—"By no power, but an old woman's pleasure. Some like novelty; but Mr. Frankland and I are better pleased to preserve the recollections of our early married life. This room has been twice refreshed, but on each occasion we preserved the old fancy, instead of indulging a new one."

"I understand the feeling," he replied; "but I do not share it. The past is apt to cling around us too much as it is. When Brackleigh is done up, it shall be in new style, not in old. But where is Mr. Frankland this morning?"

"Gone to Brackleigh. He heard of your arrival, and hurried off to give his welcome."

"He will be vexed with me, will he

not?" and a slight smile shewed a perfect remembrance of Mr. Frankland's peculiarities.

"If he *can* be vexed, now you are come home," she replied, smiling also.

"I will go and meet him. But tell me, Mrs. Frankland, are the relations of former days to be revived? May I come and go at my pleasure? May I find here what even one's own home, when a solitary one, can rarely have—rest and happiness?" There was a slight pause before the last word was said; but it was said resolvedly, and with emphasis.

"Rest, happiness, and a home," Mrs. Frankland replied, warmly. "Come when you will, and if we can give it, you shall find it here. Be as a son, for so my husband feels towards you."

"A son?" and he touched, with a half smile, his white hair.

"A son, yes. We are old; but you are young. There is youth still in your face, and youthful passion in your eyes."

He coloured, but slowly shook his head, and relapsed for a moment into thought; then suddenly rose, and repeating, "I will go and meet Mr. Frankland," hastily shook her hand, and left the room.

A new reverie, not now of herself, but of him, occupied Mrs. Frankland until Mr. Frankland's return. He came back joyous. He had met Mr. Hope—had evidently been made much of—had been requested to go again to Brackleigh in the course of a few hours, and was happy. If Mr. Hope was not the handsome boy from whom he had

parted, and to whom his memory clung, neither was he the man against whom he had protested as making himself prematurely old and unnaturally melancholy. He had talked of common things like a common man, seemed full of vigour of mind and limbs, was already a friend, spoke of future days and future plans, as one who was come to cast in his lot among them; and Mr. Frankland was satisfied.

"And how did you get over your meeting, good woman?" he asked, after detailing, at some length, his own.

"Well; I got over it well," she said. But she sighed.

"Come, now, don't sigh, Bessie. I have not felt so light-hearted for many a day."

"He puzzles me," she replied. "So calm;

and yet there seemed such a fire beneath. Is he young, or is he old? What is his history? I cannot make him out."

"Make him out," he replied, with vexation. "Why, what is there to make out? Can't a poor mortal be as he is, but we must go ferreting into his past life, to see what griefs we can hunt out? Let him be as he is, and be thankful." Then, as if repentant for his sharpness, "He'll come and sit in that corner, many a day, I guess; and we shall tell him our history, and some day he'll tell us his; and won't that do better than puzzling, good woman?"

CHAPTER XVI.

"Alas! the fervent harper did not know
That for a tranquil soul the lay was framed."
WORDSWORTH.

MR. and Mrs. Frankland might be pleased with the new comer; but, in the neighbourhood in general, the feeling excited by Mr. Hope was one of unmingled disappointment. Of all the excitements pleasing to human nature, there is none to compare, especially where country human nature is in question, with the excitement of making

a hero ; of being caught up from the monotony and insipidity of the daily round, the common task, into curiosity, interest, admiration, and wonder. This excitement Mr. Hope disappointed. For the last ten years, his return had been the one great interest of young and old, rich and poor. Expectations were very vague ; but it was certainly expected that it would be a great day when he came ; that there would be a great break in the humdrum course of life ; that there would be much to see, to hear, and to tell ; that the doings at Brackleigh would fill the void of many a vacant hour.

Such being the expectation, it was no wonder there was disappointment ; for not only were these expectations proved to be false, but, after one week, even the mo-

derate excitement he had kept up, for ten years past, ceased. Since he was come, the wonderings when he would come, and the wonderings why he did not come, and, very shortly, the statement that he *was* come, were at an end; and there was little to replace this loss. Instead of making a hero of himself, he seemed, by every means in his power, to destroy the interest he might have created. He went about in the calmest and most common-place way imaginable, doing all he ought to do in a manner that left nothing to be said. Before ten days were over, he had himself ridden round, and left his card on every human being who could have had the smallest expectation that the owner of Brackleigh would notice him. Here, again, was a most deplorable end to jealousies,

hopes, fears, and surmises. Instead of hiding himself; instead of being the recluse of Brackleigh, of whom, if a sight was caught, it would furnish conversation for a whole evening, he went about exhibiting himself, without scruple, to every eye; calling on all his tenantry; visiting the cottages of his poorer neighbours, examining, personally, into their condition, and administering to their comforts. And all this was done with little talk and no fuss. And the while he lived alone. Brackleigh was a cipher, so far as any "doings" were concerned. Very different from the days of the Brandons. It was generally believed he was rich. But he made no shew of his wealth; he collected no friends within his house; no waggons, full of Indian curiosities, streamed along

the high road. In short, he made himself as thoroughly uninteresting as it was possible for a man, in his position, to do.

It was no wonder there was a little indignation. Grown up human nature loves as little to be balked of an expected excitement as children do ; and it is the most trying of all things to have that which might have proved a real excitement, turned into insipidity by the simple obstinacy of an individual who ought to have known better.

Mr. Dacre had been the first person on whom Mr. Hope called. Mr. Dacre was six years older than Mr. Hope, and when the latter, a boy of sixteen, had left Brackleigh, Mr. Dacre had been a young man on the eve of marriage. He was

at home, and received Mr. Hope in his study. Before he left the house Mr. Hope asked to be introduced to his family, and was taken through the drawing-room, where the three sisters sat at their usual occupations. His manner was the most simple possible. He would not sit down, he said, as he had already paid his visit ; but, being anxious to make acquaintance with his neighbours as soon as possible, he had requested this introduction ; and having said a few sentences, as common-place and indifferent as it was possible to be, remarking that the weather was fine, and the flowers in great beauty, like any person who does not know what to say to total strangers, he shook hands ; and even that action was performed with a manner

so perfectly easy, so exactly as it ought to have been done, that no possible observation could be made.

The day after his visit Katherine and Anne went to call on Mrs. Frankland.

"Well, Katherine, have you seen Mr. Hope yet?" she asked, eagerly, for, whatever he might be to others, he was a hero to her.

"Yes. Papa brought him into the drawing-room to see us, when he called yesterday."

"And how did you like him?" in the same tone of eager interest.

"Very much, as far as I could tell."

Janet laughed. "I am afraid, Katherine," she said, "you have made the discovery human nature always has to make. No man is a hero to his *valet*

de chambre. In the light of common day I fancy *your* hero has faded away."

"I dislike that proverb," Mrs. Frankland said, before Katherine could answer, "and especially from lips so young as yours, Janet. It may be true, but I, at sixty, have not found it so, and you, I am sure, at one-and-twenty have no reason to say it is."

"True or not, Aunt Eliza, in the abstract," replied Janet, "I am sure it is true in this case. Come, Katherine, do be honest. Are you not disappointed in Mr. Hope?"

"If I *must* answer," Katherine said, smiling, "I am afraid it is true. I am a little disappointed."

"And why?" asked Mrs. Frankland.

"That I can hardly tell. He is very different to what I had expected."

"He may have disappointed your expectations; that is another question; he is not answerable for them. But are you disappointed in *him*?" She still spoke eagerly, as if this disappointment was a real pain to her.

"I have only seen him for four minutes, you must remember, Mrs. Frankland. Another time I may feel quite differently. Certainly yesterday I was disappointed. I had expected an uncommon person, and I did not find him one. I am afraid you will think I had foolish and romantic notions;" she continued, smiling, "but my disappointment is not in his youth or good looks, or anything of that kind. It is only

that I had expected him to excite me, to interest me, and he did not."

"That is strange," said Mrs. Frankland. "He excites, he interests me. When I hear his calm words, and look at his countenance, I think of a snowy mountain with a volcano underneath."

Anne Dacre raised her eyes, and blushing, as she always did when she ventured to express an opinion, said, "I feel just as you do, Mrs. Frankland."

Janet looked at her for a moment, then said, with more cordiality than was usual in her manner to the Dacres, "You need not be afraid of your opinion, Anne; you see you are in good company."

"I think I should feel differently," Katherine said, "if Mr. Hope seemed excited at his return, or if we could do anything

to shew how glad we are he is come. After so much thought as has been given to this event, it does disappoint me that he should take it so indifferently."

"If my aunt will not be very angry," said Janet, laughing, "I shall say it is with events as with men. No man is a hero, and no event is a romance. Romance is in our fancies about it; when it is acted, life is always prosaic."

"Is it? I doubt it. You and I at any rate," Mrs. Frankland continued, looking smilingly at Anne, "think and know that there are romances even in our common life."

Anne blushed again, not lightly, but with a deep and painful blush; and deeper still as she felt Janet's eyes upon her.

"You must not try to draw out Anne's

opinions," Katherine said, kindly. "She has a great many, but she does not like to reveal them in public." And Anne recovered herself, not without a sigh, and a wish that she could learn to be less conscious, and foolish, and guilty.

The next time Mr. Hope called on Mrs. Frankland, and that was very shortly, for he profited by the cordial welcome awaiting him there, Janet asked him what he thought of the Dacres.

Instead of replying that he had seen them but for a moment, he said, "I was affected to see that young mother, with her beautiful daughters."

"She is not a mother," said Janet, prosaically.

"Not in fact, I am aware ; but, even

at a glance, I read that she watches over them with a mother's love."

"The eldest girl is pretty?" Janet said, enquiringly.

"More than pretty," he replied. "There is something touching in her beauty. She looks as if the winds of heaven itself would be too rough for her."

"How came you to read so truly and so quickly?" asked Mrs. Frankland, smiling. "Where did you learn to have so observant an eye?"

"From my curiosity to read human nature," he answered.

"Miss Dacre is disappointed that there are no rejoicings at your arrival," Janet observed, after a short silence.

"Rejoicings!" he said, colouring. "And why are we to rejoice?"

"Because you are come," said Mrs. Frankland. "I agree with Miss Dacre; I wish to rejoice."

"There is no cause," he said, gravely. "In ten or twelve years to come, if I do my duty to them, my people may rejoice. What do they know of me now?"

"They would rejoice in hope. No bad form of rejoicing."

"Perhaps the best of all; mortals being so uncertain and capricious as they are. You are right, Mrs. Frankland," he added, after a moment's thought. "I suppose the desire for rejoicing when a wanderer returns is natural; but when a wanderer makes or permits rejoicings, it is a tacit assurance, more or less, that he is returned, that he intends to remain; and I cannot bind myself to that."

"You cannot?" she said, in startled surprise.

"No; I have entered into no compact, either with myself or with others. Nor can I do so. I must be free to go or stay; therefore no rejoicings."

"Well, we must be content with you as you are," Mrs. Frankland said, more lightly, perceiving that the subject, which, indeed, she herself would have had scruples in raising, was not pleasing to him.

"Thank you," he said, with a smile; and the conversation passed into a new channel.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Do not the flowers spring fresh and gay,
Pleasant and sweet, in the month of May?"

It was a beautiful morning, late in the ⁴ May of the following year. Janet and her cousin, Nigel Grey, were returning from a long walk. Nigel had finished his year's hard study at Würtemberg, and had returned to England, full of ambitious dreamings, vague, but sweet. A visit to Janet followed quickly upon his return. Nigel was by no means insensible

to the sympathy of his cousin with all his feelings and pursuits. His sisters were young ; his mother, though a loving mother and a proud one, absorbed in the cares of a large family, gave his tastes her admiration, but hardly her sympathy. Hard study, absence from England, and a mind absorbed in his studies and its objects, had, hitherto, kept him aloof from society ; and Janet, occasionally in person, and, more often, through correspondence, was the sole repository of his thoughts. He had not, therefore, been long in England before the desire to pour out these thoughts, to tell her all he had done, and meant to do, possessed him ; and, remembering the invitation he had received, he wrote, and proposed a visit to Mrs. Frankland. So far Janet was an object to him. But his

feelings went no further than this. He met her with calmness, parted from her with little regret. He liked her sympathy when he had anything to tell; but the shadow of such an idea as love had never crossed the tranquil mirror of his thoughts. She was his cousin; he had a right to her interest; it was a half kind of sister; less tender, but more admiring, than a sister might be; a kind of friend that pleased him well, since it gave him all he required, and asked for nothing in return. A somewhat selfish view, had he consciously formed it; but he did not. There was Janet, as thankful to hear as he to tell; and he thankfully took what was offered him.

They were returning from their walk in happy spirits, Janet looking beautiful,

and animated; Nigel more thoughtful, but well pleased.

"You are very good to listen to me, Janet," he said, suddenly, after she had listened to him for about an hour. "While I am talking, I forget that you cannot care as I do."

A slight blush tinted her cheek; but she said, very quietly, "I think I do care almost as much. It is my way to like to hear of *real* interests. What I do not care for is the mere surface."

"You cannot complain of my shewing you the mere surface. I believe I tell you everything. Have you got anything to tell me in return?"

There was the least possible bit of condescension in this question; for Nigel, without being really selfish in act or dis-

position, was certainly much absorbed in the interests of number one.

"Nothing, I think. My life is very monotonous; every day is like the day before; and I know that to-morrow (unless it be a chance to-morrow, like this) will be the same again. How should you like such a life?"

"Hush!" was all his reply, slightly raising his hand.

They were passing through the village; a pretty country village, without a street; clusters of houses, now on one side, now on the other, forming a picturesque whole. From the open window of a cottage, bowered in flowers and shrubs, sounds, or rather, one sound, was issuing; it was a voice, soft, low, and sweet.

With his hand still upraised, Nigel

crept nearer, and stood listening with bent head and lips apart. A flush passed over Janet's face, for she recognized the voice of Anne Dacre. She had long had a presentiment in her mind. Anne was reading a hymn, and this was the verse that Nigel heard :

"Shudder not to cross the stream,
Venture all thy care on Him,
Him whose dying love and power
Stilled its tossing, hushed its roar.
Safe as the expanded wave,
Gentle as a summer's eve,
Not one object of His care
Ever suffered shipwreck there."

The reading was peculiar. It had no energy ; it had something almost of monotony ; and yet there was a soothing force in the melodious cadence which pierced the heart as dew pierces the ground.

Nigel sighed, withdrew from the window, beckoned to Janet, and walked on.

"I could have listened for ever, if it had been right," he said, after a moment. "It did me good ; made me feel soft ; how or why, I don't know."

"I don't like hymns," Janet said, dryly.

"No more do I, in general ; but I liked that verse. Stay, I think I remember it. Hear me !" and with but few words of alteration, he repeated the lines, unconsciously imitating, in his manly tones, with something of a ludicrous effect, the sweet voice of Anne Dacre.

Janet laughed.

"Why do you laugh ?" he asked, nettled.

"Because you whined like a Methodist."

"Perhaps I did," and he laughed also ;

"but it would have seemed sacrilege to bellow it out. I should like to hear that when I am dying," and again he began to repeat the verse.

"That will do, Nigel," said Janet. "I am tired of it."

"That was Miss Anne Dacre, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I took one glance into the room. I saw a poor pale girl on her bed, and I saw another girl with her bonnet off, stooping towards her from her seat, with a skin like snow, and her fair hair falling down in curls behind."

"You are quite picturesque," Janet said, with a touch of contempt. "You are certainly improved, Nigel, and will be a lady's man, after all."

He laughed. He did not care enough about Janet to be irritated by a little opposition ; her occasional deviations from the rule of admiration, on the contrary, enhanced the charm of her sympathy.

A moment afterwards, Katherine Dacre appeared. He asked who it was, and, hearing the name, desired Janet to stop and introduce him.

She obeyed with ready but cold obedience, leaving it to him to speak.

"I have just been playing the listener," Nigel said. "Your sister is reading in a cottage, and I stood to hear her for a moment."

"I am on my way to fetch her," said Katherine. "She goes almost every day to read to that poor girl who is dying."

"I think the poor girl will die easy,"

he said, with a slight smile. "Such reading must be very soothing."

Here the conversation ended, for Katherine saw impatience on Janet's face, and, observing she must go on, hastened away.

"Are you tired, Janet?" he asked. "We might go back with her," looking after Katherine.

"I am, rather. We have had a long walk."

"So we have. I beg your pardon. Here, take my arm, if you are tired, and let us trudge along."

"Not so tired as that," she replied, in a lively tone; "but we have really been out so long, that my aunt will be wondering what I am doing."

"Do you ever read to the poor?" he asked, when they proceeded on their way.

"No, never," she replied, in a decided tone.

"I wonder you don't. It is rather a nice thing, I think, for a woman to do."

"Yes, and for a man too, if they can do it. I can't. Can you?"

"I! Why, no. I have not thought enough about good things to know what to read, or how to set about it."

"And I do not wish to appear better than I am. There is Mr. Hope," she added, as if desirous to escape from the subject.

"Stop and speak to him, will you, Janet? I am very anxious to see him."

"You will find him a poor kind of man for a hero, notwithstanding all my aunt says; though, at the same time, I some-

times think there is more in him than he shews us."

"There is in most men. He walks like a hero, so tall, and so stately."

"Yes; but it is a deception. He talks like a common man."

Mr. Hope was introduced to Nigel, Janet saying—"My cousin, Mr. Grey," with something of the pride she felt in him. He turned and walked with them; and though he did talk very commonly, Nigel was pleased enough to say, when they reached the house, "You go in, Janet, and rest; I will walk back with Mr. Hope, if he will let me."

While Nigel spoke to Janet, Mr. Hope perused his face; and, having done so, cordially accepted the offer.

When Nigel re-appeared at luncheon, he

said to Mrs. Frankland, "Mr. Hope has asked me to go to Brackleigh, to-morrow, for a night. I hope you will not think me uncivil when I tell you that I accepted his invitation."

Janet looked down, to hide her disappointed face; and before Mrs. Frankland could reply, there came a grunt from Mr. Frankland, and "Every Englishman's house is his castle, and I thought every man's visitor was his own."

"You think me uncivil, then?" Nigel said, quickly, some displeasure in his voice.

"No, indeed, my dear Nigel," said Mrs. Frankland, kindly. "You must not be surprised if we are sorry to lose you, but, for my part, I am glad he asked you, and glad you accepted. That is a lonely house,

and I often fancy there is a shadow at his hearth."

"He did not say he was lonely," Nigel said. "The invitation arose out of a bit of Greek. We were talking I forget about what, but I chanced to make a quotation, and he looked pleased, asked me if I was fond of Greek, and, as I am, said he had a fellow-feeling; and as we talked on, begged me to come and look at some of his beautiful editions of the Classics. That was how it was."

"I am very glad you should go," said Mrs. Frankland again. "Pray remember, my dear Nigel, that, whenever you are good enough to visit us, you are to be as free as in your own home."

"Thanks," he said, "I like that;" and, a moment after, "Will you walk with

me to Brackleigh to-morrow afternoon, Janet? I dare say Mrs. Frankland will fetch you home."

"We will see when the day comes," she replied, gaily; and as they rose from luncheon, and she and Nigel strolled into the garden, she made him repeat to her all that Mr. Hope had said.

He had said but little. That was usual. He had but drawn Nigel out; and the flattering deference with which one so much older than himself had listened to him, and his opinions, had a little intoxicated Nigel. He very willingly recounted to Janet what had passed, and did not omit some words of approbation which had fallen from Mr. Hope's lips.

Mr. Hope and his young guest walked on the terrace in the course of the following evening. It was a fine but stormy sunset; enormous patches of golden red brightened the blue sky, while the earth looked dark and solemn from the contrast. The view from the terrace was always assuming new forms; and though Mr. Hope walked there daily, and in his meditative fits, even for hours together, its changing features had always an interest in his eyes. He was silent now, as he walked and watched, and seeing him thoughtful, Nigel was so also. But to him the beauties of nature were not a matter of feeling. He could admire and criticize, but his mind was busy with too many thoughts, connected with his important self, to leave him time for calm meditation. While they

walked in silence, his eyes were not on the beauty, but on the ground. He was, as he constantly was, dwelling on, planning out, his future.

Mr. Hope was about to exclaim at the brilliancy of a streak of red light which suddenly shot from the sky, and began slowly to creep over the dark woods, when he perceived that his young companion's thoughts were not with his. Instead of speaking, he laid his hand on his shoulder, and Nigel started.

"You were in a day-dream," said he, smiling.

Nigel coloured. "I suppose I was. We have been long silent."

"Yes. When such a glory as that is spread out before us, I am apt to, try at

least, to take a flight from earth. I try to say—

‘These are Thy glorious works, Parent of Good,
Almighty, Thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair. Thyself how wondrous then!’”

“Yes,” Nigel said, eagerly; and it was singular that the eyes, which had not seen the real beauty, sparkled when the poet’s words spoke of them. He could feel the man’s poetry, though the poetry of Nature had been dull to him. Such is the difference of minds.

“But those were not your thoughts.”

“Why, no. I confess they were not. I suppose I ought to confess that they should have been?”

“I do not say so,” said Mr. Hope. “I can fancy that your day-dreams are no trifling or unworthy things. If I must

“speak the truth, I fear I envy you that you *have* day-dreams that can call your mind even from beauty such as that.” There was a touch of emotion in his voice.

“I was thinking of my future life,” said Nigel.

“And what is in your future? What are your plans?”

“They are very vague,” Nigel said. “My thoughts do no good. They do not fix on anything. I think, and wish, and plan, but come to no definite resolution.”

“Does marriage enter into your plans?”

“Oh, no,” said Nigel, stately; “my thoughts are not about love.”

A slight smile, at the lofty tone, flitted over Mr. Hope’s lips; but he offered no observation on that part of the subject. “If your plans are vague,” he asked,

what are your wishes? *They* must be more definite."

"My wishes are either to go into Parliament, or to be a lawyer," was Nigel's reply.

"A slight difference," said Mr. Hope, smiling. "And what are your father's wishes?"

"My father does not wish me to be a lawyer. He says he can provide for me, although his family is large, without any profession. He wishes me to go into Parliament; and he has a hope that I may find a seat before very long. I am quite willing to wait and see; only I am three-and-twenty, and it is already late to be called to the bar. If I am not in Parliament, I must be a lawyer."

"And may I ask, my dear Mr. Grey,

why you bound your views to these two objects; and why you join together, in your wishes, a toilsome profession, and a way of life, which has its toils, certainly, yet is not, generally, looked at in the light of toil?"

"Because," said Nigel, eagerly, "my wish is to influence. Not a quiet kind of influence, such as all may have, but a large influence. I wish to move masses of men; and I see no field for that but in Parliament, at the Bar, or in the Church. For the Church I have no vocation."

"And do you feel the power to move masses?" Mr. Hope asked, with interest.

"I think I do," Nigel said, in the same eager tone. "I do not speak from vanity. I only say what I feel. When a subject

interests me, my mind seems to swell with its multitude of thoughts, and words throng to my lips, which seem, almost without my will, to force me to utter them. I have sometimes, for the mere relief it afforded me, poured out my thoughts to the winds; and I know the words came like a torrent; and I know my words affected *me*. I may be mistaken; but I feel as if I could move men."

"Eloquence is the secret of influence," said Mr. Hope, thoughtfully, "so say some. I think they say truly, so that it be eloquence, and not simply *words*. And so this is your day-dream?" and he turned to Nigel.

"Yes," Nigel replied. "Sometimes when I walk alone, or when I lie awake at night, I fancy myself addressing multitudes; I see the crowds of eager faces

watching me ; I single out one and another, and I address myself to them, fancying their turn of mind, answering their objections, and I see, in my dreams, you know, Mr. Hope, the countenances change, sometimes sparkle, sometimes soften, just as my words are meant to rouse or to still. It is idle dreaming, but I cannot help it."

The red light had almost faded while they talked, but there was light enough left to illumine Nigel's countenance, or, to say better, to reveal the illumination by which it was lighted from within ; the dazzling blue eyes, the glowing cheek, and animated muscles.

Mr. Hope looked, and as he looked and heard, felt his heart, usually so torpid

and still, stirred by the young, fresh, eager spirit that shot from the lips and eyes of his companion.

"I think you are right," he said, in his low musical tones. "I think you can move men. You have moved me."

"Have I? How you cheer me!" said Nigel, gratefully. There was no conceit in him now. Conceit dies when enthusiasm begins.

"You have moved me to envy, to jealousy if you will; for there is a gnawing bitter feeling in my heart, at the thoughts that such as you are I might have been, and am not."

"Oh! Mr. Hope," said Nigel, earnestly, "how you speak! Deeds are better than words. I know your history, I know how you acted. A million of eloquent

speeches are nothing to one such act as yours."

Mr. Hope's lips trembled with emotion. "If it were so," he said, "more hopeless still is he, who, by one rash act, casts the promise of life away. But enough of this. Shall we go in? It must be dinner-time."

At breakfast, the following morning, Nigel asked Mr. Hope to walk back with him to Mr. Frankland's.

"You must go, must you?" he said.

"Yes, for this time. Mr. Frankland was not best pleased at my coming away. But I am sorry to go, and, if ever ——" he paused and smiled.

"If ever I will invite you again," said Mr. Hope, smiling also. "The invitation is given. So long as I am here, re-

member that a visit is a favour. Write and propose, yourself, when you please; and you will please me."

"I shall not forget," Nigel said.

"I am obliged to go to Mr. Dacre's, on business, this morning. One of my tenants, and one of his, have fallen out; and I want to make matters straight. Do you know the Dacres?"

Nigel coloured, and felt, with annoyance and surprise, that he did so. "Only the eldest," he replied, and was relieved that he could say this. "We met her walking yesterday, and Janet introduced me to her."

"She is a good girl," Mr. Hope said, with feeling. "So good that one forgets she is not a beauty. There is a younger one very beautiful. Have you seen her?"

"Yes," Nigel said, colouring again, and

feeling as provoked and indignant with himself as a young girl might have done, "That is"—stately—"I think so. A half sight yesterday, and once, in the distance, last year ; but nothing very clear."

"There is something very affecting to me in her character. She seems compounded of stuff too soft for this rude world. Even now, in her guarded and sheltered home, where nothing yet has come to try or excite her, there is often a shadow on her beauty ; as if the very weight of existence was too much for her."

Nigel felt his heart beat ; he knew not why. "She will need a strong protector," he said, after a moment, endeavouring to speak indifferently, though he was conscious of a flashing thought, at the moment he

said the words, that he should like to protect her.

"Yes," Mr. Hope replied, "such a one as she has now : as tender as she is firm, and as firm as she is tender. What a strange variety of characters there are in this world," he added, as some new thought struck him, "and how much there is to interest in all men when once the outer surface is broken through."

Nigel's lip curled a little at this. He had a very determined contempt for his fellow-creatures in general. Unwilling, however, to argue with Mr. Hope, he only carelessly said, "Yes, I suppose so, when the outer surface *is* broken ; that is, if, when the surface is broken, there remains anything to be seen." And the careless tone, or contemptuous opinion, jarring on

Mr. Hope's mood, he let the subject drop.

Observations on human character were, however, evidently, the constant occupation of his mind ; for, as they approached Sandlands, two or three hours afterwards, he said, suddenly, "*There* is a life wasted. When I left this neighbourhood, some thirty years ago, Mr. Dacre was called, on all sides, a fine young man. He was very handsome, he was clever ; and though, even then, eccentric, the eccentricity was, by many, thought to be genius ; and it was expected, my own father among the number, that he had what is called a career before him. And what a life ! Running a course of freakish extravagance, to end in an equally freakish niggardliness."

"And what has been the cause?"

Nigel asked, with interest.

"The cause of most human errors and failures, selfishness. He has always been endeavouring to satisfy his restless heart. No generous wish, no thought for the good of others, has ever animated or warmed his heart; so it appears, at least. Be warned," he said, lightly laying his hand on Nigel's shoulder. "Let your ambition be a generous, and not a selfish one."

"That it shall not," said his young companion; and again a dazzling spark shot from his blue eyes. "My ambition is to do good in the world."

"So be it."

"I see a softening influence at work for poor Dacre," Mr. Hope began again, as they passed the gates and approached

the house, "one that may yet save him."

"That beautiful girl?" Nigel asked, eagerly.

"No; strange to say, he does not appear to care for her, nor does the elder one seem to touch, although, no doubt, she guides him; but there is a young invalid, who seems to have, or to promise to have, a real power. You will probably see her this morning. We will pay a visit in the drawing-room; and perhaps you will wait for me there, while I say my word of business to Mr. Dacre."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I have known a word more gentle
Than the breath of summer air ;
In a listening heart it nestled,
And it lived for ever there."

A. A. PROCTOR.

THE two visitors were shewn into the drawing-room, where the three sisters were sitting. Rose and Anne were working, Katherine was reading to them.

Mr. Hope was evidently a constant visitor.

There was no surprise at his appearance,

and he said, in a smiling, friendly way, "I have brought my young friend, Mr. Grey, to pay you a visit. I hope we do not too much intrude on your deep morning studies."

"Our deep studies are only deep to me," said Rose. "Most people, I suppose, would call them dreadfully light."

"What are they?" Nigel asked, with the curiosity of one who had passed the chief part of his life among books.

"Katherine," Rose answered, with a bend of her head, to design the person of whom she spoke, "is reading Hamlet to us. I should find Euclid much easier to attend to."

"I want Rose to like poetry," Katherine said to Mr. Hope. "It is such a pity not to have any taste for it."

"And is that your unfortunate case?"

Mr. Hope said to Rose, with a smile.

"If I could understand it, I dare say I should like it very well," Rose said, looking as bright and full of understanding as well could be imagined; "but you must own that poetry is written in a most extraordinary tongue. I have not a guess what the words mean."

"It is true, and I cannot deny it; and yet it is a tongue we most of us learn instinctively. I agree with your sister; I hope you will learn it. While I go to speak on some business to your father, I leave you one who is able, I think, to convert you;" and, with a smile to Nigel, Mr. Hope left the room.

Nigel's hand had been hovering near the book; and, thus deputed, he boldly

laid his hand upon it. Katherine had laid it open on the table, and he saw, at a glance, that she was only in the middle of the ghost scenes, and that *the* ghost scene was still to be read. The sight and the thought fired and inspired him; and he eagerly said, "Will you let me try to convert you? May I read what comes next?"

He looked enquiringly from Rose to Katherine, with a half smile at Anne, as if convinced of her approbation.

Rose graciously bowed her consent; and Katherine gave it in willing words of acquiescence.

Most men—and even bold men—would have been too shy to make such a proposition to three strangers, in a morning

visit; and Nigel was not without the proud and bashful temperament of one who likes approval, and is unused to society. But he felt no more shyness at this moment than an accustomed preacher does in addressing his congregation, or an orator a multitude. The love of literature was a passion with him; the sight of Shakespeare an intoxication; and he dashed off, with fiery feeling, into the scenes he read; acting by the voice, though the body was still. There only remained so much of his conscious self, as prompted him three times to cast a furtive glance on Anne; and each time the sight of her fair, intent face sent him onward with fresh energy.

When he came to the disappearance of the ghost, with "Adieu, adieu; remember

me," he paused, laid down the book; and, very simply and naturally, said, "Do you like it? Have I done any good?"

"I don't know about liking poetry," replied Rose; "but you have made me like a play. I like it so much, that if you were to offer to come again, I should give——"

"What?" he asked, eagerly.

"Only my leave," she said, laughing.

"May I come again? I would give anything to read you the *Play* scene. May I come again? Do you invite me?"

Rose now looked at Katherine. She was afraid she had been over bold.

Katherine smiled. "We need not enter into engagements," she said. "It must be as Mr. Grey pleases."

Since Anne's adventure, poor Katherine

had become possessed of a kind of nightmare regarding her sister's fate ; and every young man was seen with dread, as a possible future tormentor. She had no fears that her lovely sister would not be loved ; no maternal anxieties on *that* point ; but she had great fears regarding her happiness. Her tone, however, though it, in some degree, distanced the freedom of Rose's invitation, was kind ; and Nigel, assuring her it would be a pleasure to him to return, thanked her for the permission.

A few moments afterwards, Mr. Hope returned ; and, as he entered into conversation with Rose, on the causes of her aversion to poetry, Nigel suddenly pushed back his chair, till he brought it near to where Anne was seated. With his head averted from the rest, he then addressed her.

"I heard *you* read yesterday."

Anne blushed ; she always did when she was forced to speak ; but she was now nearly eighteen, and her manners, though still timid and modest, had lost their girlish flutter, and had acquired calmness and even dignity. This change was not so much the effect of the months passed, as of the tone of her mind and thought. The one event of her life, though it could not be said to have made her unhappy, had cast a shadow on her fancy. She thought the freshness of youth was passed. She thought she knew what life's trials were. It had stilled her. Of course there was self-deception in her feeling, but the mere feeling had added a charm to her manners. There was now that "grave douceur"

about her, which was said to be the peculiar charm of the Duchesse de Longueville; a womanly quietness, that sat well on the fair young features.

"Yes, I know," she replied, to his observation. "Katherine told me you had heard me."

"Have you been to that poor girl again to-day?"

"Not yet, but I shall go. I shall not be able to go many times more," and there was a pitying softness in her eyes and voice.

"You mean that she is going to die," he said, a touch of awe in his tone. She agreed. He added, "What do you say to her? It must be very hard to comfort a person, a *young* person, in such circumstances."

"I don't know," Anne said, doubtfully.
 "Should you think it so unhappy a lot
 to die in youth? I don't think I
 do."

"Not to leave this earth while all is
 bright and beautiful! Surely you think
 earth beautiful."

"Yes, but so, too, is that world she is
 going to," Anne replied, in a low voice,
 and while she spoke a faint flush swept
 over her cheek.

"I wish I felt as you do!" Nigel cried
 earnestly, carried out of himself, as his
 gaze rested on the celestial look of her
 lovely face.

It may seem a singular conversation for
 two young people to have fallen into on
 their very first meeting; but it was less so
 for them than for most; for both were

unhackneyed in the world's ways, and both had a touch of enthusiasm in their nature, which made them not only indifferent to, but unconscious of the commoner rules of society.

Anne, however, said no more; and Nigel, after a moment, came to himself, and, as if to enter a protest against his moment's aberration, drew himself up, and remarked, in a calm tone, "How pretty the country is about here!"

Anne, unconscious of the momentary agitation, or the subsequent protest, answered quietly, and they talked for some minutes pleasantly and commonly, until Mr. Hope asked if he was ready to proceed on his way.

"I shall come again, unless I am summoned away from these parts," he said,

with a smile to Rose, when he wished her good-bye.

He had not much expectation of being summoned away, but the words were said in the same spirit as the inward protest had been made. He left himself a loophole in case he felt too much danger in a return.

He was somewhat stately in his tone of conversation with Mr. Hope as they walked the rest of the way, and it was not till he was alone with Janet, that his feelings burst forth.

In the afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Frankland went out for a drive; Nigel said he must write to his mother, and Janet had already excused herself from accompanying her aunt, by saying she had a drawing she wished to finish.

They were in the drawing-room together,

and for some time the mutual occupations went on in silence; but Nigel at last threw down his pen, rose from his seat, and walking across the room to look out of the window, said, "I went with Mr. Hope to call on the Dacres this morning. Do you know, Janet, I have a feeling that that girl, Anne Dacre, will drive me mad."

Nigel looked out of the window, according to his intention. Janet went on with her drawing, putting rapid strokes, while the unoccupied hand was tightly closed. No word escaped her lips.

After a silence of about a minute, Nigel went back to his seat, gave a short laugh, and said, "Not so bad as that; but . . . did you hear what I said, Janet?"

"Yes, I heard," she replied, coldly; a pulse of life slowly ebbing back to the

heart that had been struck as with a dagger, although with no unforeseen blow.

"Why did you not speak? You might have the grace to answer me."

"Because," she said, steadily, "I do not choose to encourage you in such folly."

"Folly!" and he started up. "If it *were* folly to fall in love with an angel, I should not be the first fool."

"With an angel," Janet said, scornfully. "You mean with a pretty face."

"I mean as I said—with an angel," he replied, with vehemence.

She made no answer.

"Come, Janet," he said, after a short pause, annoyed by her manner, "I am not very serious; I spoke more in jest than in earnest; but, if I was serious, I

cannot see why you should treat the subject in this disdainful way."

"I did not mean to be disdainful," she replied, more gently; "but you disappointed me, and I could not conceal it."

"And why disappointed you?"

"Because I think Anne Dacre utterly unworthy of such a one as you."

Half flattered for himself, half annoyed for Anne, he said, "I must be very worthy, indeed, if such a face and form are beneath me."

"Face and form!" Janet said, scornfully. "How like a man! As if face and form were all a woman's worth."

"My dear Janet, it is not for you to scoff at a woman's outward charms."

A faint blush flitted over her face, but she said, her eyes flashing, "I should scorn

myself if I thought such outward gifts were to be compared to the gifts of the mind."

Nigel looked at her with a look of reverence; he felt she was above him; for it was certainly Anne Dacre's lovely face that was maddening his fancy.

"Of course, you are quite right, Janet," he agreed, hesitatingly. "They are not to be compared; but," gathering spirit, "when both are combined, I think a man has some little excuse to admire, some little ground to be glad; and I am certain they are combined in this case."

No dissent from Janet, but neither was an assent given.

"Why don't you speak?" he said, quickly.

"What I say does not seem to please you."

"Please! Never mind pleasing. I do not care enough to be pleased or displeased. I say, in Anne Dacre's case, both the gifts of the body and the gifts of the mind are combined. And you remain silent. Agree or disagree. I don't care which. But speak."

"My dear Nigel," she said, very kindly, "I don't wish to say disagreeable things to you, but this I will say, before it is too late; if you set your heart on Anne Dacre, you will repent it."

"You speak of setting one's heart as if it was a voluntary act; as if I should take my heart so" (and he took an ornament from the table), "and place it so." And he placed it on the chimney-piece with a jerk. "You know very little about setting the heart, it seems."

She remained silent. Her lips trembled ; but he did not observe it.

"Go on," he said. "What did you say? Oh! I know. That I should repent. Why should I repent, my dear Janet?" going suddenly and anxiously towards her. "Why should I repent? Tell me. I wish to know."

"Because I know, if you married her, you would, in a few months, wake from your dream, and find her worthless."

"Worthless!" he cried, startled.

"What *I* call worthless," she said, with excitement. "I mean no hard words; I mean only with no worthiness in her. You need one to sympathize with your own soul; for yours, Nigel, is no common nature; and she would have no power. Hers is a poor, trifling, inconstant, feeble

nature. I know it well. You would wake from your dream, and be miserable."

Nigel looked blank. "I think you mistake, Janet," he said, at last. "If you had seen her face while I read this morning—for I read to them, I will tell you why another time,—you would, I think, judge differently. All her softness seemed to vanish; her face, her eyes, her lips, her limbs, even, seemed full of spirit; she looked like a bird, so bright and elastic. There *must* be a mind and heart in her. I am certain you mistake."

"After seven years' acquaintance, it is not very likely. But, no matter, Nigel, what I think. I spoke for your happiness, your best happiness; and now I will say no more." Her voice was kind and soft.

"Thanks, Janet. I know you only spoke for my sake. I am very much obliged: very. Well, the long and the short is, I had better go away, then. I may as well tell my mother that she must expect me to-morrow." He sat down again, and took up his pen. A few lines were written, and then he threw it down. "You put me out, Janet. How foolishly we have been talking; making mountains of mole hills. I shall go out and cool myself." And, as he spoke, he seized his hat and left the room.

He walked along the high road towards the village, and presently heard steps behind him. It was Mr. Roper. Nigel had not yet made his acquaintance, but he paused till he came up. The fact was, Nigel wished to remain; wished to pay

one other visit to Sandlands, but wished for a reason for doing so, not so much for Janet as for himself. He wished to hear some favourable opinion of Anne Dacre; and it struck him Mr. Roper would give it.

When asked their opinion of their pastor, it was very common among Mr. Roper's parishioners to reply, with a double adjective, "Oh! he is an excellent good man." And the double adjective certainly conveyed a more just description of him than either did alone; for the union of the two, in some way, dilutes them; and, though the quality remains, the spirit seems to have an infusion of water. Mr. Roper *was* an excellent good man, but his qualities were diluted, and had little spirit in them.

"I dare say you know who I am, as well as I know you, Mr. Roper," Nigel said. "So, perhaps, I need not wait for an introduction."

Mr. Roper was much gratified, and offered his hand cordially.

"Are you going this way?" Nigel asked. "I am taking a little stroll, and will go with you if I may."

"I am going to see a poor young parishioner, who is very sick," Mr. Roper replied. "I shall be particularly pleased to have your company."

Nigel's heart beat. He knew who this was, and knew that he should hear Anne Dacre praised. The over-consciousness made him turn from the subject, and he said, carelessly, "I was at Brackleigh last

night. I have been paying Mr. Hope a visit."

"So I heard. I hear most of the Brackleigh news. Mrs. Plumptre is a fast friend to my man, and when he comes back of a morning with the milk and butter we get from the Brackleigh Dairy, he brings the news with him. Mrs. Plumptre was very glad to have a guest."

"It is a large rambling house," Nigel said, not greatly caring for Mrs. Plumptre, "but it pleases me."

"It is a large house. It strikes me," and Mr. Roper looked as if the thought had just struck him, "that so large a house is lonely for a single man."

"Does Mr. Hope find it so? He said nothing of the sort to me."

"Nor has he to me. I spoke in general

terms." Mr. Roper paused, then added, thoughtfully, "Human nature may, I think, be divided into two classes; there are those whose thoughts lie upon the surface, and are revealed in common conversation; and there are those who are more reserved, and are apt to conceal any thoughts or feelings they may have."

Nigel said "Yes," and waited, in some curiosity, for a revelation to bear out this remark; but there was nothing further to be heard. Mr. Roper was only making known a discovery in human science.

As nothing more was said on this topic, Nigel began to turn towards the one that interested him, and, by way of prelude, enquired if the neighbourhood was a healthy one.

"Particularly so. Our soil is dry and good, and the country is so open that our air is remarkably pure. You ask in consequence of my mention of a sick parishioner; but death, Mr. Grey, is not confined to unhealthy localities. Death meets us on every side. It is the penalty of mortality."

"I think I know the house you are going to," Nigel said. "It has a laburnum in flower hanging over the roof."

"The very same. You have undoubtedly heard of the poor girl from the Miss Dacres?"

"Miss Dacre told me she was dying. As I passed yesterday morning, I heard her sister reading."

"True; Miss Anne Dacre is my best assistant in cases of suffering and sorrow. I

should say more than an assistant; for I believe her visits are preferred to my own by the sick poor. I am very thankful for the kind help she gives me."

"She looks young to attend upon a death-bed," Nigel said, with feeling. "What prompts her to do it?"

"Her sweet nature," said Mr. Roper. "To give comfort is a recreation to her. Miss Anne Dacre is a very sweet and amiable person; she has not, as yet, suffered herself, but her affectionate heart teaches her how to sympathize. Miss Anne Dacre is a very sweet person," he repeated, and a mist, like tears, glistened in his eyes.

"Hush!" Nigel said, as they neared the cottage; and, after a few steps, both paused. The same tones, low and musical, that had struck upon his ears the preceding

day, were issuing now. Anne Dacre was reading a well-known hymn, that begins—

“When gathering clouds around I view.”

When she came to the last verse, she read it with a tremulous pathos that made it most effective.

“And oh! when I have safely past
Through every conflict but the last,
Still, still unchanging watch beside
My dying bed, for Thou hast died:
Then point to realms of cloudless day,
And wipe my latest tears away.”

She stopped. “Does that comfort you, Sarah?” she asked, in another tone, but a very soft one.

“Yes, Miss Anne, it comforts me very much. While you read, I feel as if I could die happy.”

“I am so glad. Shall I read it again? Would you like to hear it once more?”

"Yes, Miss Anne, thank you. I could listen to you for ever."

And the low melodious cadence began again.

Nigel put his finger on his lips, then shook hands with Mr. Roper, and hurried away. Those soft tones agitated him in a way which he could not understand, and he walked rapidly, to still the feverish beating of his pulses. He did not stop till he re-entered the drawing-room at Mr. Frankland's.

There Janet was seated as he had left her half an hour before. She looked up from [her drawing with a smile, and a faint colour, and said, "Well, Nigel, are you cool now?"

Not very cool, as she might have seen.

His cheek was flushed, and he passed his hand hastily over his hair to brush it aside.

"I have settled to wait till to-morrow," he said, taking his letter from the blotting book and putting it in his pocket. "I shall probably hear from my mother to-morrow morning."

"And have you forgiven me?" Janet said, with a smile, "and will you trust me with all your affairs as before?"

He coloured a little, but he was surprised and relieved by her graciousness. "Forgive? Oh ! yes," he said, with equal condescension. "We all have a right to our thoughts, and I am for freedom of speech as well as for freedom of the Press. But let us have done with it now. Shall

we sit in the garden? I will read you that bit of the Iliad, if you like." And very amicably they sat down under the trees together.

CHAPTER XIX

"He quaintly said, how happy must they prove
Who study, loving, or who studious love."

CRAUEL.

NIGEL was summoned home the following morning by a letter from his mother. She said Mr. Grey had heard some news about a possible seat in Parliament, which made him anxious to have his son at hand. He had better come without delay.

Such a prospect was very grateful to Nigel; nevertheless, at the first reading of the letter there was a sensation of

disappointment. So apparent was it, that Janet said, reproachfully, "Are you not glad, Nigel? You ought to be glad."

"Glad? Of course I am. More than glad; elated! mad!" and he stirred himself into the proper degree of excitement as he spoke. He would not allow his disappointment even to himself.

"You will be off at once, I suppose, my dear Nigel," said Mrs. Frankland, kindly. "Well, we are very sorry. Duties must be attended to; but they clash, sometimes, with private feeling."

"I shall come again," he said, eagerly. "Mr. Hope has given me a general invitation; so I have two interests in this neighbourhood."

Janet said nothing, but looked down.

"Mr. Hope!" said Mr. Frankland, very

sourly. "I call that poaching on his neighbour's preserves."

"I think I shall go by the evening coach," Nigel said, after a moment's thought, taking no heed to reproaches that did not please him. "I may just as well have the day here, and travel at night." Janet fixed her eyes on him. "I must go to Brackleigh; and," he added, with a kind of resolute openness, "I promised the youngest Miss Dacre to read her a bit of Hamlet; and I shall keep my promise."

Janet averted her eyes; but there was no expression on her countenance.

Mr. Frankland, unable, in Janet's presence, to express his opinions, contented himself with rubbing his hands together under the table, and making a peculiar

mouth, quite sufficiently comprehensible to bring a flush to Nigel's cheek.

Mrs. Frankland contemplated him with a look of great interest; but nothing was said, by any of the party, regarding Nigel's plans.

It was still very early when he set off for Sandlands. He was *determined* to go there, and, once for all, to make up his mind what Anne Dacre was; whether she was, or was not, worthy to be his wife, should he please to yield to the feelings she inspired. A dread of being detained, or in any way prevented from making this discovery, hurried his footsteps, and he arrived breathless.

It was, as was said, still early; and Anne sat alone in the drawing-room. Rose had not appeared, and Katherine was with her.

Anne was seated at a table, writing, with books about her. She rose, with a slight blush, on Nigel's entrance; but sat down again, very quietly, when he told her why he was come.

"My sisters will be here very soon," she said. "Rose, you know, is not strong; and she does not come down early. But she is almost ready, I am sure. Perhaps, however, I had better go and see." And she got up.

"I am sorry to give you the trouble. I dare say they will be here directly. I know I am early; but, as I was obliged to go to-night . . . May I look at this?" he suddenly interrupted, his eager, curious fingers laying hold of one of her books.

"It is Tasso," Anne said, moving away. .

"I see. And what are you doing? Translating! and into verse! Oh! may I look?" and he stood up, bending over her papers.

"You may, if you like," Anne said, with her soft smile. "It is not well enough done for me to mind. It is only an exercise." And she hastened from the room.

She was right. She could appreciate genius; but she was not a genius. Her attempted poetical translation was only done at Katherine's instigation; one of her many plans to meet the tastes and excite the mental powers of her sisters. Nigel soon saw this; but was not the less pleased.

When Anne returned, he criticized her performance, very kindly, and very mildly,

but with just criticism, pointing out one or two real misapprehensions of the sense, and one or two places where a change of words would improve, begging her pardon all the while, and saying he himself was but a poor Italian scholar. And Anne listened, and received his criticisms with so graceful and grateful a humility, was so utterly without vanity, and so willing to be instructed, that, had Nigel not been won before, he must have been won now.

She brought word that her sisters would be down almost immediately, and Rose would be delighted to hear him read; and then they sat down, and fell into conversation on subjects interesting to themselves. Nigel ascertained that Anne liked Italian better than French, but that Dante was too difficult for her; also, that her

great desire was to learn German, in order that she might read "Wallenstein"—which she had already read in English—in the original; and that Katherine had promised she should have a master the first opportunity. In return, he told her that he had learned German, as a rest from Greek and Latin; that he had only learned a little grammar; but, having lived so long in Germany, could understand it pretty well, and talk it easily. And, having got so far, his heart began to beat with the thought of at some time being Anne's master; with the joy of having such a pupil; with the effort of restraining himself from making some such foolish speech. In short, if Katherine was afraid of another youthful tormentor, she should not have lingered those ten minutes, while Rose, with her minute attention to

her dress, was coquettishly adjusting her cap and her shawl. She thought as much when they entered the room ; for, though Anne looked quiet and calm, Nigel's cheeks were flushed, and his blue eyes very bright ; and there was a very unexpected and unnecessary warmth in his grasp of her hand.

She could not help watching ; and, before Nigel was gone, she was perfectly convinced of what his feelings were,—or rather of what, if opportunities were given, they would be. And, though there were no like symptoms in Anne, she could not see the rapt attention with which she listened to his reading, without a surmise of what would be the end of this beginning.

From Sandlands Nigel proceeded to

Brackleigh, and openly made his request that Mr. Hope would shortly invite him to return; informing him, at the same time, of the business on which he was going.

"You have some object in your request," Mr. Hope said, after cordially agreeing to it.

"I have," Nigel replied. "I wish to be in this neighbourhood again, with more freedom than I could have—I mean than I should like to take—at Mr. Frankland's."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hope; and a smile flashed in his eye, as he recalled the lofty assurance, given two evenings before, that love formed no part of Nigel's thoughts. But he made no such observation. Those who knew him might have remarked that

sarcastic words—words that could wound, or even abash—never fell from his tongue. The thought might occasionally be read in his countenance ; but a sentinel seemed for ever to stand on his lips. After a moment's thought, he said, without further questions, "Forgive me, if I offer a word of advice. I am old, and you are young; and so I may advise. Do not disappoint your father. Do not go on your present business with half a heart and a wandering fancy."

"No fear," said Nigel stoutly; for, since he had arranged his plans to his mind, he had forgotten the disappointment of the morning. "You know what I told you was the object of my life. Everything is secondary to *that*. The fear will be—that is, the doubt, for there is nothing to fear

about—that, when I am there, I shall not wish to return; and, if it should be so, I know you will excuse what I have now done, on the impulse of a moment.”

Mr. Hope smiled, and then offered to accompany him homewards.

When they entered the drawing-room, they found Mr. and Mrs. Frankland alone; and, notwithstanding Mr. Hope's presence, Mr. Frankland, who had been revolving the subject during the whole morning, at once attacked Nigel.

“So, Mr. Nigel, you have been reading poetry to Miss Anne Dacre?”

“No, sir. I have been reading to Miss Rose Dacre,” Nigel coldly replied.

“Ho! Miss Anne left the room, did she? That was bad taste. Well, Mr. Nigel, this reading to young ladies is a

very pretty employment for a young gentleman."

"I am very fond of spouting," Nigel said, restraining his irritation. "I mean it to be my vocation in life, and I am glad of every opportunity to practise it."

"You are very right. And, for one who intends to speak in Parliament, it is capital practice to speechify to young ladies." And Mr. Frankland rubbed his hands with delight.

Nigel coloured. "It is easy to ridicule," he said; "but I mean what I say. Practice in all things is useful; but for one who intends to speak, there is *nothing* like practice."

"Very true, very true. You will be an effective speaker, Mr. Nigel."

"I mean to be so."

"Come, don't be such a teaze," said Mrs. Frankland, playfully stretching out the fan, that could not reach him, to her husband. "Nigel, my dear, Richard has been in great perplexity about your box. You had better go and talk to him. I believe it ought to be off, if you intend to walk to the coach."

Nigel thanked her, and left the room.

"That boy will be the death of me," said Mr. Frankland. "There he is, over head and ears in love with Anne Dacre, and thinks no one knows it but himself, carrying it off with that stately air of his."

"Not over head and ears," said Mrs. Frankland, gravely, for she was grieving for Janet. "You make too much of a fancy."

"Over head and ears, good madam,"

he repeated, positively. "Anne Dacre will never be loved by halves. I myself am obliged to keep out of the girl's way, or she would be making sad work with my old heart."

"For shame," Mrs. Frankland said, smiling. "What talk is this for me to hear, and what an example for Mr. Hope."

"Some men," Mr. Frankland continued, "like masculine women. But why? we are masculine enough in all conscience" (though it might be questioned if *he* was). "What we need is the grace, and purity, and softness, and refinement we have not ourselves; such a young creature as Anne Dacre. That's the thing to drive men mad. What do you say, Hope?" for Mr. Hope had stood all this while listening without speaking.

"In theory I agree with you," he replied, seriously. "As for practice, I confess I am always thankful to see a woman who can take care of herself. It is so much pain and care saved to us and to her."

"That is the most unchivalrous speech I ever heard," exclaimed Mrs. Frankland, "and one I should not have expected to hear from you. What better care for a strong man like you than to protect a weak woman?"

An expression of perfect agony altered his countenance for a moment, made his cheek livid, and tightly pressed his lips together. But, before the expression had passed away, he forced an answer and spoke indifferently. "True. Your young friend, Nigel Grey, will be willing enough to protect, I should fancy. You laugh at

him, Mr. Frankland, and I too am often moved to smile, but what a charm there is about him ; not the less, perhaps, because of his little infirmities. He moves me strongly when he speaks from his heart."

"The boy would be well enough if they would let him be," he replied sourly; "but what good can come of those German Universities?"

Mrs. Frankland thought long and deeply on the part she should best act towards Janet. Though she thought Mr. Frankland exaggerated the danger, she could not doubt that Nigel's fancy was touched by Anne Dacre, and, if such was the case, it seemed that no time should be lost in opening Janet's eyes to the fact.

She delayed, however, dreading the task,

till a letter of anxious enquiry from Nigel's mother, seeming to give a real being to what she had hoped might be a passing fancy, forced her to delay no longer.

Mrs. Grey wrote ostensibly to thank her for all her kindness to her son; said how well he looked on his return; informed her that he was gone with his father to see the gentleman on whose resignation his hopes depended; and then added, "Nigel is very anxious about this seat in Parliament; yet, to tell you the truth, not so anxious and excited as we had expected. I fear you have some dangerous lady in your house or neighbourhood, who has drawn his fancy in a new direction. You will much relieve an anxious mother, dear Mrs. Frankland, if you can give me any information on this subject. I might

question dear Nigel, but am unwilling to do so, unless there is real ground for anxiety."

In the course of the day, therefore, when she and Janet were alone, Mrs. Frankland mentioned to her, in a light and careless tone, the enquiry that Mrs. Grey had made; and then said, "It has struck me, Janet—I don't know if it has ever struck you—that there may be some little truth in her guess, and that Anne Dacre is the object."

"Oh! yes," Janet said, looking full at her aunt with a smiling and impassive face, "I know it is so. He told me all about it."

"Oh, indeed!" she said, astonished and relieved in almost equal degrees.

"But you must keep this to yourself, Aunt Eliza," Janet added. "You know

Nigel talks to me as he does to no one else, and perhaps I was not doing right to say even so much as I have done."

"Do not fear," Mrs. Frankland replied, and allowed the subject to drop. She was relieved, but she was disappointed. An attachment—this attachment—was the thing to which she had always looked as the event which would do more to improve Janet than all her cares and pains for her welfare; as that which would soften and subdue her, draw forth the latent good, enticing her out of herself into love and charity towards all men. She was disappointed, but smiled presently, as she found her thoughts wandering about in quest of some other object, to replace the one that was eluding her grasp.

Mrs. Frankland was, however, correct

in her estimate of the benefits of this attachment to Janet's nature; for at this time, while struggling with secret and disappointed passion, the softer places in her heart, and she had soft places, began to be crusted over with some of those worser qualities which hitherto had swayed only with a divided empire.

CHAPTER XX.

Words and stones thrown away do not return.—

SPANISH PROVERB.

A FEW days after Nigel's departure, Mr. Frankland went to London on business. On his return, having executed some commissions for Katherine, he walked to Sandlands, to report the success and disappointments he had met with. Janet accompanied him.

They found Katherine and Anne with their bonnets on ; and Mr. Frankland, who

had come for a good talk, was extremely put out, and, as usual, made no secret of his discomposure.

"We are in no hurry," Katherine said, in vain. "We are going with papa to Brackleigh, to see some Indian shrub now in flower. Mr. Hope begged us to go ; but papa is not ready."

"I would as soon not talk at all, as talk to people in a hurry," he said, peevishly ; "and if you are not in a hurry, you look so ; and that comes to the same thing." And he stood, very tall and very cross, in the middle of the room.

With a simultaneous movement, Katherine and Anne both took off their bonnets, and threw them on the floor ; and somewhat mollified by this proof of submission, he drew a chair to a table near Katherine,

and began to exhibit what he had done, and excuse himself for what he had not done.

By the time this was over, he had forgotten that Katherine was in a hurry ; and, leaning back, he entered into conversation. "And who do you think I saw in London?" he said, after a few other facts had been mentioned. "I had almost forgotten his existence. I was going down the Strand, and I was standing, like a great country booby, staring into a lamp-shop, when I felt a hand on my arm, and I heard a voice, 'Why, Mr. Frankland, is it you?' or something of that nature ; and I looked back, and there was that young man—Trevethlan I think he calls himself ; a curious name I never could remember."

Though, from the first, Katherine had instinctively felt what was coming, and was therefore prepared when it came at last, she could not hear a name which, completely dying out of remembrance, had not been pronounced before her for three or four years, without emotion. A blush—a very faint one, but still a blush—flitted over her cheek, and she endeavoured to conceal it by stooping down and lifting her bonnet from the ground.

From Mr. Frankland it *was* concealed; for he said, sharply, “What do you do that for? I thought you were in no hurry.”

“No more I am,” she replied, and put down her bonnet again; and at the moment meeting a sharp glance of Janet’s eyes, immediately recovered herself, and said, boldly, looking full at Mr. Frankland,

"Well, Mr. Frankland, you must tell us more. What did he say to you? Had he heard anything of Mrs. Harcourt?"

"I did not ask about *her*. You hear from her, and that's enough. I asked about himself—why he never came down here?—and I told him to come. I said we should all be happy to see him."

"And what did he say?" Katherine asked, her inner heart beating with an excitement that astonished her, but the counter-excitement of baffling Janet making her outwardly free and calm.

"Oh! he thanked me, and said he should like it, and he hoped to come some day, and all that; and then he asked how you all were. He seemed glad enough to see me, I must own, but he never asked me

to his house. Not that I cared, I was engaged; but it would have been friendly."

Katherine did not dare to make an apology for him. She only repeated, "And he said nothing about the Harcourts."

"No, I tell you. When we see a person we have not seen for a dozen years, we do not ask about strangers; we ask about themselves."

"Not a *dozen*, Uncle Frankland," said matter-of-fact Janet.

"Don't correct your betters, Miss Janet. I was speaking generally. One does not ask about strangers, and I did not ask him. I asked him how he was getting on in the law, and he said 'Very well,' and that was a great deal for a lawyer to

say. They are not very ready to say that."

"Does he look old, Mr. Frankland?" Anne suddenly asked.

"What should he look old for, my dear Miss Anne?" he said, turning towards her, and speaking softly, though his words were sharp.

"It seems so long ago. I wondered how he looked."

"He looks pretty much as he did. I suppose he may be an elderly man of thirty by this time; and if so, he has worn well, I can tell you. He is not decrepid *yet*."

Though Mr. Frankland would willingly have told more—was indeed longing to relate all that had passed—Katherine, when

the subject dropped among the younger ones, did not dare to press it farther, and talked of other things till her father appeared. She then invited Mr. Frankland and Janet to go with them.

"You had better come, Frankland," said Mr. Dacre. "We are going to see one of those follies on which fools waste their substance."

"I like follies," he replied, "so I will go with you."

"And I will stay with Rose," Janet said, "and walk home by myself."

Mr. Frankland, thinking the visit to Brackleigh would give her pleasure, demurred; but she had evidently determined to remain, and so it was settled.

When the rest of the party were gone,

Janet drew her chair closer to Rose's sofa, and looked as if she, in her turn, would have a gossip.

"How pretty Anne is growing," was her first observation.

"Not growing," Rose replied, in her decided way. "Annie was always pretty."

"Well, then, growing still prettier," Janet said, with cordial good-humour. "I never saw her look so pretty as she did to-day. Uncle Frankland is a great admirer of hers, and so I think is Mr. Hope."

"The fact is, Janet, nobody can see her without admiring. Some may think her too fair and quiet, but everybody must see that her features are perfect. Though I am her sister I know that, and so don't let us discuss Annie's beauty any more."

"Some would think you jealous, Rose,"

Janet said, laughing. "I was not going to discuss beauty; I was only going to observe that you must be making up your minds to lose her. A face like that will not long be kept at home."

"I suppose not; but I will not think of evil days till they come."

"Evil days! Surely you do not speak of Anne's marriage as an evil day."

"And surely, Janet, you cannot suppose I should speak of it as a good day. Of course it must come, I know that; and I shan't fret when it does, at least I hope not, but I don't long for it. We are happy as we are. I dread changes."

"Yes, I understand." Janet paused; looked thoughtful, and then added, "There is one reason which I think should make you anxious for Anne's marriage."

"And what is that?" Rose asked, with unfeigned curiosity."

"Katherine—for Katherine's sake."

Rose looked bewildered.

"Why, Rose, you must own it would be a happy thing for Katherine to have a little more freedom. Now while she has a beautiful girl like Anne to take care of, she cannot have it, but Anne's marriage would give it to her at once."

Rose's large blue eyes were fixed, in enquiring surprise, on her visitor. "What do you mean, Janet?" she said, at last. "I don't understand the least what you are saying. Is not Katherine freer than most people? She never seems to wish for anything different."

"Katherine would never shew what she wishes, you know, Rose. She is not that

sort of person; but if it has never struck you, I had better not say what I was going to say."

"If *what* has never struck me? Do, Janet, speak out for once, and tell me what you mean." Rose raised herself excitedly on the sofa.

"Just lie down, Rose," Janet said, laughing, "it is you who make so much of everything. All I mean is, that Katherine is now twenty-seven, and her whole youth has passed in taking charge of you and Anne. Of course it has made her happy so far; but now you are both growing up, she must naturally begin to remember that her youth is passing, and that it is time to have hopes and fears for herself."

"I don't believe a bit about it," Rose replied, petulantly. "Is not this her home,

and may it not always be so; and are not we more than sisters, and more than children to her?"

"Well, Rose, I suppose you know best; but I certainly have sometimes thought that Katherine has, or has had, wishes."

Rose did not make any immediate answer. She was struggling between the natural desire to know, and a dread of hearing some unwelcome truth. But curiosity—not simple curiosity, but curiosity impelled by affection—gained the victory; and having decided that she would hear all that could be told, however unpleasant, decided also that she would hear it quietly and without apparent emotion.

She therefore said, "I can easily believe, Janet, that your eyes, which are sharp enough (rather too sharp to please me),

may have made discoveries which it never would have entered my brain to make. But I cannot think you can have more than a suspicion, which, after all, may not be true. I don't know, but I suppose you mean that Katherine *likes* somebody; is what is called in love, I mean."

"No, my dear Rose," Janet said, laughing, "I do not accuse any one, so grave and staid as Katherine, of being in love. What would she say to me for such a libel? No," she added, more seriously, "what I mean to say is this—I fancy that Katherine did *once* like somebody, but, feeling at that time *bound* not to leave her home, sacrificed her attachment. That is what I fancy."

"Who?" Rose asked, pure and simple curiosity in her tone.

"I should not have said a word," Janet continued, without heeding her, "but that I sometimes feel sorry for Katherine; and I know you, Rose, well enough to be sure that what I say is safe with you. Years pass on, but they bring no change to Katherine, nor will they, so long as Anne is unmarried; but, when that comes to pass, I see a hope for her. Anne could never be left without a protector, one to watch and guard her all day long; but I often think, Rose, that *you*, even already, are strong enough to be trusted to your own devices."

"Trusted! Yes, I hope so," Rose said, coldly. The coldness was from the inward disturbance produced by Janet's words. Janet did know, did intend, that they should agitate; but hardly, perhaps, ur-

derstood the keen pang with which they struck upon the heart of the invalid sister. The peace and calm of her home—purchased by Katherine's presence and Katherine's influence—seemed, by a fairy touch, to be transformed into the dead and stony calm of a desert. After a moment, however, she mastered the acuteness of the sensations, and said, even with a smile, "But, Janet, all this time you leave me in ignorance. There must be a person, an actor in this tale. Who is he? Who has Katherine ever liked?"

"A name we heard this day," Janet said. "I have often thought of this, but it was Katherine's countenance to-day that made me more certain than ever of the truth."

"To-day?" Rose said, musingly. Trevelan's existence, so long unrecalled,

had for years passed out of her memory. After a moment, however, with sudden intuition, "Mr. Trevethlan?" she exclaimed, "you don't say so. Oh! yes, I see. Perhaps it may be true, after all."

"Ah! now you think as I do?"

But having hastily expressed herself, Rose, with a *retenu* above her age, now refrained from any further questions or observations. She was indeed literally burning to hear more; but she felt that what Katherine had studiously concealed for years was not now to be idly discussed with Janet. She only replied, "Yes, I suppose it may be true; but I will say, as I did about Annie, let the evil day be postponed as long as it can."

"I am afraid I have annoyed you," Janet said.

"Not at all. I am very much obliged to you."

"Obliged?" she repeated, in surprise.

"Yes, Janet, obliged," Rose said, seriously, "you have made me feel how selfish we have been in supposing that Katherine was always to be at our command. I shall try now to learn another lesson. But I must think it over, and we need not talk of this any more."

"You must not repeat what I say."

"No, of course not. I understood you to speak in confidence."

Janet took her leave, not entirely satisfied with her operations. To take a glance into Janet's heart, a simple desire to sow the seeds of mischief in a family she had never liked, and now hated, had prompted her words; to make the younger sisters dis-

trustful of, and uncomfortable with Katherine, and to do Katherine some unknown injury. This had been the desire. But, fortunately, mischief-makers do not always accomplish that which they intend. Fortunately, even with mischief-makers, the word "at random sent"—

"Finds mark the archer never meant."

Uncomfortable enough she made poor Rose ; but the issue of her meditations was not that which Janet had expected.

After Janet's departure she lay on the sofa, with a flushed cheek and beating pulses, going over and over the years that had past ; racking her memory for recollections, for hints ; questioning Katherine's conduct, endeavouring, on various occasions, to recall her words. From thence she darted into the future, picturing, almost

with shuddering, her home, with Anne and Katherine absent. Then, again, she retraced her steps to the past ; meditated on the years of devotion, of exclusive devotion, which she and Anne had received from their elder sister, and the comparatively poor return of gratitude they had yielded ; giving her, indeed, their exclusive love, but accepting her devotion as their natural portion.

For Rose to have a head-ache was no uncommon thing ; and, when, therefore, on Katherine's return, she found her with a throbbing head, no suspicion of unusual excitement was aroused, nor did Katherine dream, during the next ensuing days, of the cogitations which occupied her young sister's mind. Rose did, however, meditate, and deeply ; and the result of her medita-

tions appeared in a conversation she had with Katherine some three or four days afterwards.

"Do you think, Katherine, there is any way in which I could be of use? I have been thinking lately that though I am ill I still may be of some use in the world."

"I thought you had grown thoughtful, dear Rose," Katherine said, smiling, "and were these your thoughts? You are quite right. I am sure you can be of use, if you wish it."

"I do wish it; but it requires thought to see how. I cannot go among the poor people, as you and Annie do; and I don't feel the spirit to teach. It must be another kind of usefulness. Could I help you, Katherine, in any way? You have so

much to do, and to think of; and, if I helped you more at home, you could do more for others."

"Yes," Katherine said, cordially, not exactly seeing what Rose could do; but unwilling to damp her desire by a doubt. "I dare say, in some of your meditations, you have thought of some particular thing. Do tell me your thoughts."

"I was thinking of the house books, Katherine; I know how you dislike them; I always see your face on a Tuesday morning. I know it is not only the summing part that you dislike, but still you do dislike arithmetic, I know; and, if I was to write and do the sums it would save you a good deal of time; and perhaps I could come to be more useful afterwards."

"But you hate sums, my dear Rose. I

thought they always made your head ache."

"I hate them, I know, and therefore I fancy they make my head ache; but I dare say it is fancy; and at any rate I should like to try. You know, Katherine, you say it is not good for us always to have our own way, and never to do a disagreeable thing."

"Not for Annie and me, who are well and strong, but you may indulge a little, Rose. You have had your cross, and not a light one, laid upon you, and it must be hard work to bear that as well as you do."

"It may be, but you know the hardest work of all is, not to be selfish, and wilful, and thinking only of my own pleasure. That is what I am afraid I am, and that is one reason why I wish to try and be of

a little use to you, Katherine, who never think of yourself at all."

Touched and admiring, Katherine kissed her, and consented to her wish; and a new element from that day began to bestir itself in the house. Rose knew even better than her sisters did, how much greater than theirs was her power over her father; and she resolved gently to pave the way towards taking on herself the dreaded weekly task of examining with him the household expences. To make herself more to him, to learn how in time to take Katherine's place, and leave her free; this was the hope which now occupied the mind of the young invalid, and towards the fulfilling of which she slowly, secretly, and silently bent her energies.

It was an object not to be accomplished

without trouble and some pain. A regular task, slight as was the one at first attempted, was irksome to the petted invalid, and it was no fancy that application made her head ache. But Rose was now determined, and a little pain could not deter, nor dislike daunt her; and, as was natural, the consciousness of being of use did, in fact, cheer and brighten her life. So Janet's words were far from being thrown away.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Sweet lady, never since I first drew breath,
Have I beheld a lily like yourself."

TENNYSON'S IDYLLS.

THE wishes of Nigel were on this occasion doomed to disappointment. The gentleman on whose health and consequent resignation their success depended, was anxious to try what a few more months would do for him, and since the Session of Parliament was for that year almost over, he postponed the reconsideration of the subject until the

winter. He behaved most kindly to Nigel; promised him the earliest intelligence when his mind was made up, wished him success, and added that he would give all the assistance in his power to ensure it.

Mr. Grey was disappointed at the postponement of his hopes for his son, and still more at the uncertainty that hung upon their fulfilment for the future. Nigel, too, said he was disappointed; nevertheless, when he heard that for the next few months he was to be at liberty to go where he pleased, and do what he pleased, the throb and bound of his heart was not exactly the heart's usual expression of disappointment.

"I am so sorry, my dear boy," said his mother, on his return home, leaving her sympathetic interest in the small troubles

of some small children, to condole with the large trouble of her first-born. "I thought it was all settled now, and that we should have you a great man at once; but a few months will soon be over, and you must not take it to heart."

"Oh! no, mother, I don't. I am dreadfully disappointed, but you know we ought not to grumble at poor Mr. Delamere's improved health."

"I forgot that," she said, candidly, having indeed in her interest for her son, entirely forgotten on what his success depended. "You are very good to remember, my dear Nigel."

"I can easily wait for a few months," he continued. "If then no present prospect appears, I must have another talk with my father. I must"

"Never mind the future," she interrupted, eagerly. "Since you are willing to wait a few months, I am content. I was afraid you would be for that dreadful lawyer business again. Let us wait. There is plenty of time."

"A few months I can wait," he said, with decision, "no more."

"Well, well; and what shall you do with yourself? I want you to go about and amuse yourself, dear. You ought to be making a few acquaintances at your time of life. What do you think of a tour in Scotland?"

He smiled, coloured, shook his head, and said, "I want to amuse myself a little. That is the truth. Leave me in peace, dear mother. I am going to stay with you for a few days, and then I think I

shall go and pay another visit to that Mr. Hope at Brackleigh. I like Mr. Hope, and I think he likes me."

His mother looked at him very keenly. Mrs. Frankland had playfully replied, in answer to her enquiries, "that there *was* a very beautiful young lady in her neighbourhood who might possibly be the cause of Nigel's undecided wishes;" but added that she could not imagine there was any definite ground for suspicion. The words "in the neighbourhood" had *almost* destroyed Mrs. Grey's dread that Janet was the object of her son's pre-occupation; but she could not be certain that her explanation of the words was correct.

It was a dread of Janet's influence which had, six years before, been the cause of her change of residence. Mrs.

Grey had early seen her attachment, and, disliking both Janet and her father, had thought a removal absolutely necessary.

She now said, uneasily, "That neighbourhood has become very attractive to you, Nigel."

"Yes, mother, I like it. I like a great many there."

"Who?" she asked, with blunt curiosity.

"Why, the Franklands, of course, and Janet, and Mr. Hope, and others."

Possibly Nigel, thus questioned, would have been more frank, had not his mother unfortunately had a habit of forgetting that small children had intellects. She was so accustomed to the presence of her large family, that she considered it like a piece of her furniture, never remembering that a young man was not likely to reveal

the secret feelings of his heart in the presence of ten eyes and ears at least, some no longer in unreasoning infancy. It was this habit which had originally made Janet the friend and confidant of Nigel, instead of the mother whom he dearly loved. Her superior talent was not half the attraction; the exclusive attention, the conviction of inviolable secrecy, the perfect trust that what he said was said to her alone; this had been her attraction.

The word "others," however, completely dispersed Mrs. Grey's fears. She was quick enough to guess that the unmentioned others contained the interesting name; and, so relieved, she turned away to soothe with her sympathy the sorrows of a lesser boy, whose heart was broken by the dis-

covery that a painted dog, however beautiful, will not bear a plunge in scalding water.

Free to indulge his own secret wishes, Nigel devoted himself for several ensuing weeks to the prosecution of his enquiry, whether or not he was in love with Anne Dacre, and whether or not she was worthy of being the wife of so distinguished a person; and during the enquiry he became, as he had foreboded, "mad" about her. A short visit to Brackleigh, however, and a short visit to the Franklands, had not advanced matters very much, except in his own heart; and he was considering how best to effect his purpose of another return, when Mr. Hope saved him the trouble. Early in August Nigel had taken charge of his mother and her family—Mr. Grey being occupied—and had safely con-

ducted them to Tenby. From thence he was summoned by a kind letter from Mr. Hope, requesting his return to Brackleigh, as he was making up his mind to have a party, and Nigel's assistance would be invaluable to him.

Nigel thankfully obeyed the summons. The party was, indeed, solely for his and Anne Dacre's sake. With a calm, kind interest Mr. Hope was watching Nigel's mind; and, convinced that its secret wishes were very much for his good, with the thought that characterized him, gave to that state of mind his unobtrusive help.

To Nigel's enquiry when the party was to take place, he replied that it was fixed for the following day, and added, "I have a breakfast, tea, or early dinner—call it what you will; but *you* are the object of my party. You are

my surprise. I must beg of you to lie *perdu* till to-morrow."

"From all but the Franklands and Janet. I think Janet ought to know I am here," was Nigel's reply; and to this consideration for the claims of relationship, Mr. Hope agreed, and proposed to walk over to the Franklands after dinner.

For his amiable remembrance of Janet's claims, Nigel took to himself some credit; yet, if the secret source of the remembrance be probed, it must be acknowledged that it was Nigel's own desire to see her, which was the cause of the exception he made. Janet was the depository, the sole one of his present passion. Even to her he had said but little, for he was totally unconscious how it absorbed him, but, on one or two occasions, when very mad

when a lover's fears had excited him beyond bounds, he had, into her faithful bosom, poured out his soul.

On these occasions she had listened with warm interest and with kind sympathy ; never concealing her disapprobation, never failing to suggest that Nigel was throwing himself away, yet making her opposition so gently, that while in her presence it acted on Nigel as a stimulant rather than otherwise. Not so in her absence. When alone, Janet's words and manner, coloured by fancy, would recur to him ; and uneasy sensations would trouble the sweet dream of bliss in which he loved to indulge. Not many days before this, her first strong word "worthless"—that "he would wake and find Anne worthless,"—had flashed like light-

ning on his brain ; and, for one night, had stirred him into a tumult of fear and emotion. He was longing once more to converse with her before any fatal step was taken.

Neither Mr. Frankland nor Janet was gratified by Nigel's sudden appearance. Mr. Frankland because he could not help an expression of surprise ; and to be surprised was very displeasing to him. Janet, for many reasons, but chiefly because she clung to the thought that she was Nigel's confidant, and felt injured in even a momentary exclusion from that office.

Without troubling himself to analyze Janet's feelings, Nigel, almost unconsciously, felt she was not pleased, and as uncon-

sciously excused himself. "Mr. Hope wanted to keep my coming a secret, but I would not from you. If it had not been a sudden freak, you would have known before." And the cloud cleared from Janet's brow, and a smile flashed across it, at this acknowledgment of her supreme right to his confidence.

To make himself, according to his custom, as uninteresting as possible, or perhaps to avoid all fuss and excitement, Mr. Hope had only sent out his invitations on that day; and, not having met with him since his little note was received, Mr. Frankland attacked him on his great doings.

He received the attack with good humour, and said playfully, "I am revolving still greater doings in my mind. If I play the host to-morrow to my

satisfaction, I may enlarge my sphere, and even yet surprise you all."

"Then I suppose, Mr. Hope," observed Janet, who was not famous for the tact of her observations, "you now intend to settle here, and these are to be the celebrations for your arrival, which you refused us last year."

His countenance was clouded over at her words, and a pause followed them. "No," he then replied, rousing himself, "my doings will not be grand enough to be called celebrations." He paused again, and then added, "You may put, however, this meaning on them if you please, that there is a greater chance of my settling here than there was last year."

And again a pause followed, and the

conversation seemed to have irrecoverably lost its easy tone.

Nigel relieved the whole party, and pleased Janet, by saying, "Janet and I will take a turn in the garden, if you have no objection, Mrs. Frankland. That is, will you, Janet? You are not afraid of catching cold?"—and they strolled out together.

Before he turned to his own affairs, he said, "You should not speak so lightly to Mr. Hope, Janet. He does not like it."

"But I cannot consider what everybody likes," she replied. "I take great care to please you, Nigel. The rest of the world must bear me as I am."

"You are very flattering," he said, laughing, and not ill pleased; and a little lecture

on indiscretion, which he had proposed to give, was blown to the winds.

"Well, Janet, here I am again," he then began. "And I dare say you guess for what I am come."

"Yes, I guess."

"Well, and do you now wish me success?"

"Is it come to that?" she asked, in a somewhat startled tone.

"Oh! no, not to *that*. I have not even made up my mind; and I have not the least idea whether or not Anne likes me . . ."

"Anne," said Janet, dryly. "It is come to *that*, then?"

"Only to you. Only in my thoughts. I used not to like the name of Anne, but now it seems to me like music; especially Anne Dacre." And he pronounced the name very melodiously.

"Come, Nigel, you make me laugh. Remember, I am not in love. Let us go back ; what did you say?—do I wish you success? Dear Nigel," and her voice was soft as she spoke, "I wish you happiness all your life long, if you mean that."

"Thanks. Thanks a thousand times," he said, very eagerly. "Yes, I meant that; and yet I meant more. You do wish me success in this very thing; now don't you, Janet?" in an almost coaxing tone, "now that you see I am bent on it."

She was silent.

"Oh ! Janet, speak," he said, with an impatient stamp of his foot.

"You put me in such a difficult position," she said, seriously. "You know exactly what I think. I think Anne Dacre totally and entirely unworthy of you ; and, dread-

ing that you yourself will some day find it out, I feel it hard, very hard to *wish* for this thing; but I wish for your happiness, that you may depend on."

"Thanks," he said again, but coldly.

"I give you pain; not half the pain, though, that I give myself to speak. But I may be wrong, she may be all you think; only take time, you know her but little as yet. Don't let passion hurry you away."

"Passion!"—very loftily—"I never was cooler in my life. No, no; you are right. When the happiness of a whole life is concerned, one must not go blindfold. I will not take a step as yet. I will see how she looks to-morrow, and then think further of it." And, having talked himself into the conviction of being cool, cold, deliberate, and undecided, he suffered his fancy to

settle on Anne without doubt, or restraint.

The news of Nigel's arrival did not get abroad—that is, it did not reach the Dacres ; and, as it was for them that the surprise had been prepared, Mr. Hope was satisfied.

He was satisfied, and so was Nigel, when they saw Anne Dacre's face at the unexpected sight. To one who blushed so much, a blush was nothing ; but there was a startled force, a lingering intensity in this blush, that gave it meaning. Katherine was satisfied likewise. She had, for some weeks, ceased to look on Nigel as a possible tormentor. Observing in him the elements of a strong and high-principled character, seeing him suited to her sister's tastes, and able to be a protector

and guide, she had watched, with something almost of impatience, the tranquil unconsciousness with which Anne had received his attentions. She dreaded that, in the perversity of human likings, her fancy was lingering with the worthless love, and was not to be forthcoming for the worthy one. That fear passed away as they entered Mr. Hope's garden. So also vanished her fears lest Nigel's hopeful passion should have died away in absence. She saw the rapt expression of his speaking countenance as he gazed, and she began to anticipate a more rapid dénouement than she had in any way expected.

Certainly Anne's appearance this day was enough to have turned an older head. Since the sensation produced by her ap-

pearance at Sidmouth, Mr. Dacre, though always with complaints of extravagance, had commonly submitted to Katherine's wishes regarding her sister's dress. The sum he allowed for such purposes was ludicrously small, but propriety and simplicity were all that Katherine asked, or, in fact, that Anne's beauty needed. Ornament on her was thrown away. This day she was, as usual, very plainly dressed, but entirely in white: a white muslin gown and cloak, and a white bonnet, with a tuft of lilies-of-the-valley. Her bright lips, her dark blue eyes, and her cheek, slightly flushed, were the only tints of colour about her. She looked, certainly, inexpressibly lovely; but that which completed her charm was an air of timid modesty, which not only was unconscious of beauty, but

seemed, on the contrary, doubtful of any power to please.

Mr. Dacre was with his daughters, gloomy, as usual ; but not in his heart dissatisfied with a prospect of diversion. Attended by Mr. Hope and Nigel, they strolled to the terrace, where several people were standing. Mr. Roper was one who stood there, and he pointed out to Katherine his wife and nephew under the trees, and Janet with them. Young Mr. Roper, an officer, and an occasional visitor at his uncle's, was a silent adorer of Janet's, and this adoration gave rise to many small pleasantries during the yearly visits he paid to the neighbourhood.

"There is Alexander, you see," Mr. Roper said to Katherine. "He was to have gone this morning, but Mr. Hope's party, with

certain inducements"—an arch look accompanied this—"made a slight change of plans. We will not say what the inducements were," lowering his voice mysteriously, and looking at Mr. Hope and Nigel.

Neither Mr. Hope nor Nigel was, however, attending to him, and the poor man's little pleasantry fell to the ground.

Mr. Hope went to receive some other party, and Nigel asked Anne to walk with him to speak to Janet. He was longing to shew her to Janet before a speck of the dust of the world had touched her whiteness.

Anne glanced timidly at Katherine, to implore her to come also; but Katherine did not appear to understand, and they went off together. She believed that Anne

did truly prefer to have her protection at all times, but she could not think her company was equally agreeable to Nigel.

Finding herself alone with her father and two or three other gentlemen, she withdrew, and sat down at the end of the terrace; and, after following Anne and Nigel for a few seconds with her eyes and mind, her thoughts went off into another direction.

Her meditations became so deep that she was startled when Mr. Hope spoke to her.

"You are thinking," he said. "I think I guess the subject of your thoughts."

"I don't think you do," she replied, smiling. "I was thinking of old times; things that happened long ago."

"Old times and long ago," he said,

smiling also. "It amuses me to hear the young use those words so lightly."

"I am not young," Katherine said, not well pleased at the imputation.

"Well; so be it. I will not argue the point. May I ask what old times occupied your thoughts, or would it be too indiscreet a question from an old, and yet a new friend?"

"I was thinking of Brackleigh in old days. Those old days when the Brandons were here. The garden to-day looks as it did then, and my thoughts went back to the time we passed with them. It was a very happy one."

"Ah!" he said, "I have heard you mention the Brandons several times, and I wish to ask your opinion on a subject that is occupying my thoughts. Those

Harcourts! do you suppose they would visit me? Would they be glad to see Brackleigh again?"

Katherine's face brightened with pleasure; then was overcast as she said, "I used to hear from Mrs. Harcourt constantly, but now I know little of them, except that she is unhappy, and out of health. They were very happy for a few years after their marriage, but two years ago they lost two children, one, their eldest, a child of five, and Mrs. Harcourt has never recovered it; last winter they were in the South of France, and though I know they are now in England, I don't know where."

"That is soon found out. A return to this place, the scene of their courtship and marriage, might be good for her. If

I have your consent, I think I will try, though a stranger, whether I can induce them to come."

"My consent? oh, yes," Katherine said, eagerly, "I think it an excellent plan."

"I hear of Mrs. Harcourt from the cottagers here. To have left as deep an impression as she has done, speaks of itself for what she is. I shall write in their name, in my own, and, if you will allow me, in yours also."

"Oh! yes," she said, again smiling, "you may say all you please from me."

He leant against the balustrade near her, and, after a short pause, she said, "What did you suppose I was thinking of?"

"To explain myself requires permission. I was going to touch on private affairs,

therefore sacred ones. Am I a sufficiently old friend to dare to do it?"

"I must trust to your discretion," she replied, laughing. "Do not ask what ought not to be asked."

"I will ask nothing, then. I will only speak. I fancied you must be thinking of an event which may possibly occur in your family; and I was anxious to tell you how great my interest is, and how warmly I desire it may occur." He paused, and then went on. "But why speak in riddles? I am not, unfortunately, an indiscreet youth. I may be trusted, and I will say plainly what I think. I think Nigel Grey loves your sister—*loves*—it is not too strong a word, used even in its serious sense. That boy has deep feeling, and she has touched the very

source; I trust you think and feel as I do, that he is worthy even of a pearl of great price, as I am sure she is."

"I am glad you appreciate Anne," Katherine said, gratefully. "She is so retiring, she does not show what she is. I am speaking of character, not of beauty. I know you see that."

"I think I see all she is; her perfections, and—will you forgive me?—her weaknesses also. It is because of her weakness that I should wish to see her in Nigel's hands. He has strength; he has a strength that is, in certain ways, too rigid and stern, but what might be a fault for some characters will be, I think, a virtue for her. She was not formed to live without earthly protection. Some are not. Happy are those who find a wise and strong pro-

lector." His cheek was pale as he spoke these last words, and he pressed his lips, as was his habit at times, tightly together; but he said nothing in explanation of his emotion, and Katherine, who had often observed how random allusions affected him, without seeming to perceive it, answered quietly—

"I think you are right about Mr. Grey, I am sure you are about Anne; but I would really rather not talk on the subject. In these things not to speak, not to think, not even, if possible, to wish too violently, is wisest. The future is so uncertain, characters so different to what one thinks, that I should never dare take steps to assist events."

"You are right—right, as you always are," with a kind, grave smile, "and in

theory I agree with you. In practice I wish this marriage so strongly, that I fear I should take steps were they in my power. But enough. How is your other sister amusing herself to-day?"

"She is very good," Katherine said, "and never objects to being left alone. I am sorry when pleasure calls us away, but I have made up my mind that it is right. At Anne's age such change and society as can be had, are necessary ; and I never hesitate about leaving Rose."

"I am sure she understands you. Miss Rose has a remarkable character; I fancy both you and your father will some day find a helpmate in her."

"I think so too," Katherine said, "and I am glad to think it."

"So am I."

After this reply, Mr. Hope spoke no more; but moved away, and gathered a few flowers.

"I must go and play the civil host," he said, as he came back and put the flowers into her hand. "I dare say you would rather sit still?"

"I see Mr. Frankland coming," Katherine said, smiling; "and after I have heard what he has to say, I must go and look for Anne. Pray don't trouble yourself about me."

He left her; and Mr. Frankland seated himself on the garden seat she occupied, and delivered his opinions on all that was going forward with his usual half-playful acrimony. He was in tolerable good humour; but, not having quite recovered Nigel's unexpected arrival, he commented,

with great bitterness, on Mr. Hope's behaviour in robbing him of his own proper guest.

Janet, as may be believed, had not been as delighted to see Anne Dacre's graceful and tasteful appearance as Nigel expected. She spoke to her, and spoke to Nigel once or twice, with indifference, and then returned to pursue her conversation with Alexander Roper. Nigel simply thought she was otherwise interested, and was turning round to invite Anne to walk on with him, when he found that, during his few words with Janet, she had escaped, and had seated herself, three or four yards off, by Mrs. Roper. He pursued her, and threw himself on the grass at their feet. He knew enough of Mrs. Roper to feel tolerably indifferent to her

presence, and was so completely absorbed by his feelings for Anne, that he no longer thought of concealment, or dreaded the eyes of the world.

The sight was more than Janet could as yet bear, and she very shortly said she was tired of sitting down; and, followed by her young adorer, went in search of her uncle.

"How very pleasant and cool it is," observed Mrs. Roper. "This party reminds me of old times. How time does fly to be sure. Do you remember the evening when we all sat under these trees, Anne dear, and you and poor little Rose carried round the tea-cups?" Whether from pity for the flight of time, or at the mention of Rose, Mrs. Roper's eyes were already in a mist of half-tears.

"I remember," Anne said; and timidly turning her eyes on Nigel, added, with a smile, "That was long before Mr. Hope came."

"So I should imagine," he said, smiling also. "I believe we are only just about celebrating the anniversary of his return."

"I can hardly believe it is only a year since he came, he is such an old friend now. I feel to have known him for years and years."

"Time is nothing, I feel as if I had known you—" Nigel paused, and endeavoured to catch Anne's eye, before he added—"all, all my life."

But Anne did not look up; Nigel was, however, as well satisfied to see her nervously twisting some flowers he had plucked on their route.

"Good Mr. Hope," said Mrs. Roper, "one so soon feels at home with a good man."

"I don't quite think that," Anne said, quickly. "I feel as if he was a friend, I am sure I should go to him as a friend if I wanted one; but I don't feel at home with him. There is something."

"How do you mean?" Nigel asked, smilingly. "What is the something?"

"I hardly know. I can't express what I mean. I don't mean that he is not what he seems, but that he is more than he seems. Mrs. Frankland once said he reminded her of a volcano under snow; and that describes my feeling. He is so calm and friendly with *us*; but I feel as if he could be so different."

"I should be sorry to think that," said

Mrs. Roper, shaking her head. "I like people to be what they seem."

"So do I," said Nigel.

"But you misunderstand me," Anne said with eagerness. "I mean no wrong thing; nothing false. I only mean that I do not think we see all he is. That there has been, or is, some mystery about him. It interests me to watch him."

"I wish there may be no hidden sorrow in his life," said Mrs. Roper, and the thought brought the misty tears again. "I sometimes think there is."

Emboldened by the tears in Mrs. Roper's eyes, which he fancied blinded her, Nigel now said, "In spite of interest, if you will not be angry with me, I agree with Mrs. Roper. I like all to be as clear as day, and white as snow; and I am

thankful indeed that no veil of mystery, however interesting, hangs over those I most care for," and a look of love, trust, and almost worship, accompanied the words, which Mrs. Roper would have been blind indeed if she had not seen.

She began to think she had better move, but then she recalled how shy she had been when Mr. Roper began to speak his mind, and then glancing with motherly interest at Anne, she felt that in her agitation there was an appeal to her protection. With some feeling of discomfort, therefore, she remained; and, after a moment, said again, "How cool and pleasant it is under these trees."

"Very pleasant," Nigel said warmly; but Anne made no response.

The effect of Nigel's words or looks

had indeed surpassed his warmest hopes. An intense blush had crimsoned even the finger tips of the small uncovered hand that held the flowers; and, when it slowly and gradually died away, her downcast face became marbly white.

How Nigel longed that Mrs. Roper would depart, that he might beg Anne's forgiveness for having spoken so plainly, and then speak more plainly still, may be imagined. But Mrs. Roper sat firm and quiet, until Anne, recovering herself, looked up, and said, "I wonder where Katherine is. She does not know what has become of me." And she got up as she spoke, with a tight clasp catching hold of Mrs. Roper's arm.

Mrs. Roper, again remembering Mr. Roper, understood it all; and submitted

herself entirely to Anne's wishes. They all walked together back to the terrace, and found Katherine still engaged with Mr. Frankland. He rose, and Anne took his place, and no more during that day could Nigel succeed in luring her from Katherine's side.

This mattered little, however. Nigel had never intended to take any decisive step. He had been, on the contrary, firmly persuaded all the morning that he was still undecided. "He was very glad," so he repeated to himself, more than once, when annoyed at his ill success; "it gave him time for thought." Nevertheless, a secret uneasiness, lest, after all, Anne might not be won, took possession of his mind, and kindled, if it wanted kindling, his passion to a full height.

Katherine saw that Anne was no longer as she had been when she parted from her. She was then blushing, trembling, startled, but happy. She was now pale, quiet, and self-possessed; whether happy or not Katherine could not tell. She submitted herself, as Mrs. Roper had done, to her very apparent wish for protection, and while at tea, and during a short walk in the woods, steadily remained by her side. Nigel was never long absent, and, save under Katherine's care, Anne talked to him as before; listened to his opinions; allowed him to draw out hers; found how they sympathized in their tastes, and seemed at ease; but if Katherine was occupied, if her attention was taken up by others, if Nigel became demonstrative, then Anne changed; shrank back from

his eager talk ; and made it impossible to him to draw nearer to the expression of the feelings she inspired. Whether it were simply the shyness and modesty of her nature, or whether she wished gently to repel him, Nigel, when arguing alone, after her departure, could not tell. This only he felt. She *must* be his. He must and would win her ; and he could not, and would not, long remain in suspense.

On the return of the Dacres to Sandlands, Anne looked in to the drawing room to nod at Rose, and then went straight to her room. It was unlike herself ; who generally endeavoured to make up to Rose, by full narrations, for all that she had lost.

“ What is the matter with Annie ? ” Rose said to Katherine.

"I don't know," Katherine replied. "I think she must have been annoyed in some way, but I don't know." After a pause, she said, "Mr. Grey is come back. He was there."

"But I don't suppose that annoyed Annie," Rose said, smiling.

"I should not have thought so ; but it may be that. I must try and find out." And when she went up to dress for dinner, she entered Anne's room.

Anne was still sitting, with her bonnet on, looking out of the window.

"What is the matter, Annie?" Katherine said, approaching her. "What has disturbed you?"

"I am trying to think," she replied, with a sigh. "Oh! Katherine," and her pale cheek became rosy red, "I have been so happy, and so miserable, to day."

"I think I can guess why happy," Katherine said, lightly kissing her; "but why miserable, I cannot guess."

"Because I am not what he thinks. I am not . . . you know what I mean. He thinks I am; and when he knows, he will care for me no more."

Katherine, unconsciously, looked grave. That Norman Montague had been forgotten to-day, and the thought of him always brought a vague, disagreeable sensation to her mind.

Before she could speak, Anne seized her arm, with a grasp that was almost painful, and cried, "Oh! then, Katherine, you think I must give him up?"

"My dear Annie, I think no such thing," she said, quickly. "I advise you, at present, to put *that* affair out of your

head. You have nothing, at this moment, to do with it."

"Only that I am deceiving him," she replied, gravely.

"But not in any way that you can help." Katherine thought for a moment, and then said, "I don't wonder at your feeling annoyed. I quite understand how you must feel ; but I think this : It is impossible, it would not be right, for us all to go about telling our secret histories to those who have no right to know them. So far, all men and women are alike. They ought to act and decide, in such a matter as marriage, with all their powers and principles awake ; but still they run a chance—all do—that there is some unknown thing that may not quite please them in the history of those they have

chosen. As soon as ever, the very moment there is a right to know, then, I think, no secret should be kept back ; and there is still a choice then."

"I would rather he knew now," Anne said, with a sigh ; "and then, and then"—and she again tightly grasped Katherine's arm—"let him go, if he must."

"How long have you cared so much for Mr. Grey ?" Katherine said, looking at her in some surprise.

"I don't know. Do you think I care so very much ?" And she looked anxiously and innocently in Katherine's face.

"I fancy so." And Katherine smiled.

"I am afraid I do ; and I am so surprised. I fancied, till lately, I never, never could care again ; and now I believe I do more, much more. And oh !

how I wish it was the first time. I am a deceiver. I know I am."

"My dear Annie," Katherine said, gravely, "I must not have you talk in this way. I have told you that I understand your feelings ; but plain, common sense is a good guide in such matters. Just ask yourself if it would be right, if it would be becoming, for you to put yourself forward to tell your history to Mr. Grey, before you know for certain whether or not he wishes to have you for his wife."

"No, Katherine," she said, blushing deeply; "not when you put it in that light."

"It is best to look at things quite plainly, dear Annie. It saves many mistakes. As soon as ever Mr. Grey has a right to know, I know you will tell him ; and he will love you all the better for

your truth and courage; and he will be very severe if he blames harshly a young girl of only sixteen." And she smilingly kissed Anne's cheek. But Anne folded her hands, and looked wretched.

Katherine had not time for more words, for Mr. Dacre might not be kept waiting; nor did any deviation from common rules please him. She thought it best to treat the matter lightly; and, therefore, with a few more words of plain sense, begging Anne to dress, and put it out of her head, she hurried away.

Anne obeyed her; and when Katherine wished her "good night," and asked if she was happier, she blushed, and said, "Yes. If it ever came to a right to know, she would tell *at once*; and then she should be perfectly happy."

CHAPTER XXII.

Is thy servant a dog?

LATE in the afternoon of the following day, Nigel appeared at Sandlands.

The three sisters were in the garden, Rose's sofa having been wheeled out, that she might enjoy the air. Anne was seated on the grass, working; and Katherine was reading aloud.

She and Anne got up to shake hands with him; and, in reseating herself, Anne perversely placed herself between Rose and

Katherine, out of his reach. He had looked eager and bright when he approached, but a shade of vexation now crossed his brow, and he said, as he threw himself on the grass, "I am so tired. This morning Mr. Hope dragged me over his farms ; this afternoon a lawyer from London suddenly arrived about some Indian business, and, seeing I should be in the way, I went over to Mr. Frankland's, to ask if I might dine there ; I then went back to Brackleigh, to tell Mr. Hope I was engaged ; and now I am on my way to Mr. Frankland's again. Hard work, this hot weather."

"Did Mr. Frankland receive you graciously ?" Katherine asked, smiling. "He does not seem to be much pleased at being robbed of his guest."

"No, not graciously, but still he said I was to come ; and so I must go soon. But I came to see you first." He tried to catch Anne's eye, but she worked steadily on.

"I have never seen your grounds, Miss Dacre," he cried, springing up, after a very desultory talk. "I wish you would shew them to me."

Katherine instantly rose and acquiesced, and they crossed the garden together.

"You must let me speak to your sister," he then said, in a peremptory tone. "I beg your pardon," the next moment, "I hardly know what I say. Can you let me see her ?"

"I will try," Katherine said, smiling. "Should you like to see that little copse ? There is a walk through it."

"Very much," he said, eagerly.

She turned back, and he followed her. "Mr. Grey wants to go further than the garden. Will you shew him the wood, Annie? Your bonnet is just inside the window." She stooped and whispered, "Do go, there's a good girl. Don't tease him."

Anne rose ; and, without looking to the right or the left, walked into the drawing-room, and fetched her bonnet. Nigel followed her. "You hardly want a bonnet," he said, gently. "I like you so; but don't catch cold." And the next instant he forced her to put it and a shawl on, and they walked off together.

It was a long time before they re-appeared; when they did, Anne hurried away into the house; and Nigel as

quickly came to the spot where Rose and Katherine were still sitting. He seemed to walk on air; and his bright blue eyes were shining with a brilliant light.

He shook hands with Katherine and Rose, without knowing what he did; and then beckoned Katherine away.

"It's all right," he said. "Since yesterday I have been so madly miserable. I fancied she did not care; and, though I longed to come, I hardly dared. But it's all right, and I'm like one in heaven. Are you glad?"

"Very," she said, warmly; and held out her hand.

"She tells me I must go for to-night; and I suppose I must; and she says, if I go that way I shall meet Mr. Dacre. I

don't care who I meet, now she's mine; I care for nothing in this world."

"You must take care of her," Katherine said, gently. "We shall give you up a very precious thing; and, like precious things in general, she must be cherished. Annie is not one of the common people of the world; she will want a kind guardian and a kind friend."

"*Kind!*" he said, passionately,—"*Oh!* Katherine, it will not be that. *Care!* I will take such care of her; it will be life to me to take care of her. Do not fear that. Well, I need say no more now. If Mr. Dacre says yes, I shall be here in the morning. You will let me come early, and all day long, won't you?"

Katherine smiled, and he turned back and flew to Rose. "Dear Rose," he

said, holding out his hand to her. "I beg your pardon for calling you all by your names, but I am so happy I can't help it; you must not grieve to lose her. You shall not lose her much. She says she could not bear that, and she will do all she pleases, and I will be a real brother to you." And in his real brotherliness, he seemed very much inclined to kiss her cheek.

Rose's heart was very full. The days her fancy fearfully pictured, the days when her home was to be a desert, seemed about to begin; and his kind words brought the picture more fearfully before her. She tried to smile, as she slightly drew back her head, and gave him her hand; but, as soon as his back was turned, her tears fell fast.

Katherine walked with him to the end of the garden; and then thoughtfully and slowly returned. It had all come so suddenly upon them, she had not had time to picture what Rose had long been picturing. Her mind was occupied by a wonder whether Anne had confessed her first attachment, and, unable to bear her wonderings long, after a few words with Rose, she went up to her room.

She had scarcely opened the door, before Anne flew into her arms, with a quickness, with almost a violence of movement, which was totally unlike her usual quiet self. "Oh! Katherine, I am so dreadfully happy," were the words with which she saluted her.

Unwilling to damp her happiness by inopportune questions, Katherine sat down

with her, and talked, and listened to all she said with motherly interest; waiting, and waiting in vain, for her curiosity on one point to be satisfied. Anne did not recur to it.

It was Katherine who was obliged at length to ask the question. "Well, Annie," she said, "and was he very severe about that one thing that troubled you?"

Anne's countenance changed. "Oh! Katherine," she said, reproachfully, "I could not tell him to-day. I could not spoil his first joy. Do you think I could?"

Katherine looked grave for a moment, but, shaking off her gravity, said, "I don't know. I think I should have done it at once; but, of course, I can't tell. I might not."

"I could not to-day," Anne repeated.

"To-morrow I will, the very first thing; and he is so, so—I don't know what to call it—that I shall not mind; but to-day! It was best to have one day of perfect happiness, was it not?"

Katherine kissed her, and smiled, and said no more. She did not wish to make "a thing" of it, but she left the room with the vague, disagreeable sense of Mr. Norman Montague, however vaguely, very disagreeably, on her mind.

Janet was in the garden when Nigel arrived at Mr. Frankland's. She was evidently expecting him, but she was certainly not expecting the eager rush, the hurried clasp, with which he approached her, and seized her hand. Her colour changed; she drew back, and,

194. KATHERINE AND HER SISTERS.

stroking her hand and a ring she wore, said, coldly, "You hurt me, Nigel."

"Did I?" he exclaimed. "I am very sorry ; but, Janet, dear Janet, never mind now. What do you think? It is all settled. She loves me, *loves* me, loves *me*; and I know it." Nigel rang the changes on the word, as a fine declaimer changes the emphasis on Dryden's "None but the brave deserve the fair ;" but with him it was unconsciously done.

"Oh ! is that it ?" Janet said, recovering herself, with wonderful presence of mind. "Then, I suppose, Nigel, I must give you my poor hand again." She stretched it out, and then added, "And, indeed, in more senses than one, it is with an effort that I do it."

In his mood of romance and gallantry,

he had been about lightly to kiss the hand she held out; but, at the words she added, he let it drop, and said, "Why?"

"Oh! you know why," was the answer.

"Oh! Janet, but are you not pleased that I am so happy? Do you mean to go back to all that nonsense again?"

"I will go back to nothing, dear Nigel, that you dislike; for, indeed," and now her voice had its softest tone, "I do wish you happy. But you cannot be surprised that my mind does not so quickly follow yours. When was it that we spoke last? Was it forty-eight hours ago? You know what I thought then; and I know what you told me then. You cannot be surprised that I am startled to-night."

"Ah! but, Janet, I had not seen her

then. Did you see her yesterday? You must have done it. What angel ever was so fair!"

"Quite true," Janet said, and smiled. "She did look like an angel yesterday."

"And to-day, and every day, she looks the same, for she is one," he said, positively; for there was a something under Janet's smiling words that annoyed him.

She was silent.

"I would rather you contradicted me," he cried, with some heat.

"My dear Nigel," she said, gently, "don't let us quarrel, you and I, in the midst of your first joy, too. I cannot think her worthy of you; but you ought not to quarrel with me for that. Your choice has a little disappointed me, and I should not be true if I pretended otherwise; but

this again should not make you angry. Most probably you are right and I am wrong, and certainly you must know best what pleases you. Leave my opinion alone; and I assure you I will do my best to love her as I should wish to love your wife."

He could say no more in anger, but his mood of eager joy was damped; and when she began again, cheerfully, "And now, dear Nigel, tell me all about it; you know they say a woman likes to hear all, not to speak of my own special interest in the matter," no rush of words, such as five minutes before would have been hers, followed. Very sedately the few things possible to tell coherently were told; and in these his interview with Mr. Dacre bore the largest share.

They walked about, however, for some time longer, Janet continuing to question and striving to soothe. It was only as they entered the house that she provoked him again.

"And so it is really all settled, and you are half way to be a married man!" she exclaimed, in a tone of innocent wonder. "How strange it is, and how quickly all changes in this mortal life take place. Let me see; how long have you known Anne Dacre? I don't suppose she has seen you above twenty times. It is strange, is it not?"

"I think less of time than others do," he said, quickly.

"It is right you should," she replied, smiling, "for you know you were very quickly won; and, indeed, in a man I

don't think it so strange. In a woman I must say I cannot understand it. But that is nothing; we never do understand one another."

"Do you think it strange that I have won Anne Dacre so soon?" he asked, in a restless tone.

"No, dear Nigel, indeed I don't. In *general* I think it shews some lightness of nature to be very quickly won. I like affections that take root and grow up; but in this case I have nothing to say. *You* are her excuse, and a very sufficient one. In fact," she added, laughingly, "it might have been the same with me. There, Nigel, there is a compliment."

But no compliment could do away with the idea she had suggested. He said no more, but during the whole time of his

dressing he found himself counting up and endeavouring to multiply the occasions on which he and Anne had met. Neither calculation nor multiplication could, however, make it otherwise than a rapid attachment, though there was much in the calm country scenes, in which it had been formed, to be thrown into the opposite scale.

A cheerful dinner banished these reflections; and when they left the dining-room, having given Janet permission to make known his engagement, he received the kind and warm congratulations of Mr. and Mrs. Frankland with pride and unrepressed exultation.

"Well, Nigel," Mr. Frankland said, beginning very shortly to tease, as was his wont, "this is rather a curious change of

prospects. We were all beginning to look up to you as a Senator, and, behold, we must be content to look up to the married man."

"I hope you will look up to me in both capacities," Nigel said, good-humouredly.

"No, no; that would be too much to expect. The chains of love may not be galling; but we all know they are pretty stiff. When a man has a fair young wife to look after, his country must give up her claims."

"If I had not thought my wife would help me," Nigel said, his colour rising, "I should not have chosen her."

"Fine talk," said Mr. Frankland, rubbing his hands delightedly; "but I know how it will be. If this fair young wife expresses a wish to go round the world, the country may go the dogs."

"Never," Nigel said, with vehemence. "My duty will always be first with me, as I know, too, it will be with her."

"Your duty!" said Mr. Frankland, folding his hands demurely. "Will you tell me, Mr. Nigel, what you consider your duty to be?"

"You wish to provoke me, Mr. Frankland, but I won't be provoked; and you mean to scoff at me because I think I have duties, but I don't mind scoffing. I think my duty is to do all the good I can in this world, and especially to use the talent that I feel has been given me, to persuade men to act justly and to love mercy, whatever question may arise."

"Well, my boy," he said, kindly, "go on and prosper. I won't tease you any more. Only don't be too confident in

the stability of any man's resolutions; your own among the number."

When Nigel set off to return to Brackleigh, Mr. Frankland accompanied him to the door, and went a few steps with him, in the moonlight. "I would not say it before them," he began, nodding his head upwards; "but I can't be easy without saying it You have made a good choice, and, so far as man can see, one that will ensure your happiness; but you must take precious care of the young thing you have chosen. She is one of those fair, frail things whom even one rough word might crush for ever. You must be very tender of her, my dear boy."

"No fear," Nigel said, smiling. "Do you suppose, when I talk of duty, that I

do not consider her happiness my very first duty?"

"All right," said Mr. Frankland, "you will excuse my saying it. She touches my heart as if she was my daughter, and I believe it would kill me to see her unhappy."

"No fear," repeated Nigel's fresh, clear voice, and he walked along, in the bright moonlight, erect and gay; while a swarm of thoughts of future joy, love mingling with ambition, love sweetening ambition, made his lonely walk the happiest part of his happiest day.

He saw Mr. Hope on the terrace, and joined him there; and Mr. Hope sprang towards him, with an eager exclamation, as soon as he appeared.

"All well, all settled," was Nigel's

reply. And again cordial good wishes were poured out to him.

His lonely walk and lonely musings had restored him to his mood of romance, and there was no affected stateliness in his tone as he spoke of his happiness. With a manner half companion-like and half paternal, Mr. Hope listened and sympathized; but, at last, his warning words came also. In substance they were the same as Mr. Frankland's, though still more earnestly delivered. Anne Dacre was young and tender, and he was to take loving and tender care of her.

"Why, what is this, and what do you all take me for?" Nigel exclaimed, half amused, and half provoked. "This is the fourth warning I have had to-day

not to be a brute. Even Mr. Dacre, in a surly tone, told me I must be careful of her. Am I a wild beast?"

"Not a wild beast," replied Mr. Hope, gravely, "but a very young man, who has chosen a very young wife; one gentle and timid; one of those whom the Scriptures would call 'little ones,' and of whom it is said 'Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depths of the sea.'"

These last words were spoken with a vehemence that held Nigel silent in astonishment; and, before he could recover himself, Mr. Hope went on again.

"What I mean," he said, resuming his calm, grave manner, "is, that when a man

chooses a wife so young, so timid, and so inexperienced, he must prepare his mind for possibilities. He must face the thought that in her youth there may be follies; in her timidity and inexperience, possibly, frailties; he must face the thought, I say. He must remember that he is to be a guide and guardian, but not a tyrant; he must remember, too, that one rash act may crush such fragile things for ever."

"You are warning me," Nigel said, in a dry tone, "that human nature is imperfect; and that I am not to expect perfection. Well, I do not. I do believe, indeed I often think, that if we were not all so mightily determined on being sinners, we might be much more perfect than we are; but still I allow the fact, we are not perfect; therefore, I shall expect from my

wife no unorthodox perfection. But if you tell me that because I have chosen a young wife, I have therefore married myself to folly and frailty, I say that you slander youth; and, if it were civil to say so, I should say that you slander Anne Dacre."

"God forbid," Mr. Hope said, seriously, and in no degree moved by Nigel's warmth. "I did not mean to offend. I spoke, I gave my warning because—because I have seen . . ." He paused and hesitated, and then, breaking off, went on, in a sedater manner, "because *she* is timid, Nigel, and you are bold; and perhaps, in your bold youth, over severe; but I have done. Only, if need be, remember my words."

Nigel thanked him, but somewhat coldly; and again the mood of romance was driven away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Where is the maiden of mortal strain
That may match with the Baron of Triermain?
She must be lovely, and constant, and kind,
Holy, and pure, and humble of mind;
Lovely as the sun's first ray
When it breaks the cloud of an April day;
Constant and true as the widow'd dove;
Kind as a minstrel that sings of love;
Pure as a fountain in rocky cave,
Where never sunbeam kiss'd the wave;
Humble as maiden that loves in vain,
Holy as hermit's vesper strain."

BRIDAL OF TRIERMAIN.

AFTER Nigel's departure from Sandlands,
on the evening of the day following the
day of betrothment, Katherine went in

search of Anne. It was almost dinner-time, and she had expected her appearance in the garden or the drawing-room, but in vain. She found her in her own room, seated at her window, her head leaning on her hand, and an expression of deep dejection on her beautiful features. As Katherine approached her she blushed painfully, and then turned away her head.

"What is the matter, Annie?" Katherine asked, cheerfully and kindly. "We have hardly seen you this afternoon, Rose and I, and we were longing to hear so many things."

Anne sighed.

"Are you not happy?"

"Too happy, and most miserable," was the tragic reply.

"Is it about that silly thing?" Katherine asked. "Surely Mr. Grey is not angry?"

"I have not told him," Anne said, in a humble, dejected voice.

"Oh! Annie;—how foolish!"

"Not so *foolish*, Katherine; but very wrong. I know how wrong. He thinks me what I am not. I deceive him, and I cannot tell him."

"But why, dear? Why make yourself miserable about such folly?"

"Because I am a coward. I mean to speak; I meant it this morning—oh, so firmly meant it. I put it in my prayers, Katherine, that I might do it; but I have not done it."

Katherine was silent. She felt, it was not the first time that she had felt, the

want of plain common sense and simple moral courage in her sister's otherwise almost faultless character. She felt the want, and felt how great a lack those two things make; but she felt also how hard it was for those who possess these gifts to enter charitably into the difficulties of those who possess them not, and therefore was silent.

"You are angry with me, Katherine?" Anne said, humbly.

"A little," was Katherine's reply—for she did feel angry—"but much more sorry than angry. There is quite enough sorrow in this world, Annie, without our making *ourselves* miserable. I am sorry to see you, by a little foolish cowardice, preparing what may in the future be a real trouble to you."

"I know that. I see it all quite plain."

"And yet you cannot make this small effort."

"It is not a small one. If you had felt my heart when I got near it to-day, you would know it was not small to me. I thought it would break with beating."

"Poor child!" Katherine said, softly stroking her hair; and there she stood, in deep thought, by her side. At last her meditations broke forth in words. "Shall I do it for you, Annie?—it would be easy to me."

She made the proposal reluctantly, feeling it was unwise, yet pitying her sister's weakness, and very desirous to put a stop to so foolish a disturbance. She expected to have it eagerly accepted,

and was startled by the indignant denial with which it was met.

"Oh! Katherine, what must you think of me?" Anne said, springing up, and drawing out her slight figure to its full height. "How could I ever expect him to respect me? How could I ever, all my life long, respect myself, if I was not able to make this one confession? Oh! Katherine, how you must despise me!"

"I think just as you do about it, Annie," she replied, quietly; "and I am glad you refuse me. I only spoke because I think anything is better than making a misery of a folly like this."

"It is not a folly," Anne said, quickly.

"I call it a folly now," Katherine persisted; "but," she added, seriously, "very soon I shall call it much more. If, in

your conversations with him, you feel that you deceive him, it becomes more than a folly."

"I know; and that is what I do. I deceive him."

"But you will not, dear Annie? you will do it to-morrow."

"Yes, I will; I *must* do it to-morrow. I meant to do it to-day, and I came very near it. I will tell you how it was," she said, suddenly. And she poured forth in Katherine's ears an incoherent account of what had passed.

More coherently told, this was how it was.

Nigel arrived immediately after luncheon, to pass the afternoon with his betrothed. Mr. Dacre had stated, in his first interview with Nigel, that he thought the afternoon hours were enough

to idle away in talk, and begged him to confine himself to them. In private, he gave himself much credit for this judicious arrangement; for, while seeming only to provide for his daughter's intellectual good, he did provide against the intrusion of a hungry stranger on the sacred hours of luncheon and dinner.

After passing a short time with her sisters, Nigel invited Anne to walk with him; and she put on her bonnet and set off, revolving in her mind how best and soonest to introduce the subject that perplexed her mind.

She was never a great talker, and her meditations making her more than usually silent, it was no wonder that the conversation was shortly taken out of her hand. Nigel *was* a talker, as has been

said; and, to a sympathizing listener, was inclined to talk of himself. Secure of sympathy, happy in the perfect confidence of that sympathy, he now poured forth into her ears all the history of his life; his trials, struggles, wishes, and hopes. And there was no doubt of the sympathy of his hearer. Anne forgot herself, as she listened, and was only recalled to the remembrance of what she had to do, when he came to an end, saying: "I think I have told you everything, Anne; and if you wonder that, at four-and-twenty, I have told no tales of love, I can only say that it is because there are none to tell. I have had no love tales; you are my first love; and, dear Anne, I am so thankful now that it is so, so thankful

that I can bring you a heart as fresh as you bring me."

"But you mistake me," Anne ought to have said, and the deed was done; but she did not say it. Startled at his words, startled into recollection, she could not at once gather up her courage. She temporized, prepared the way, and the first moment was lost.

"It would have been nothing to me," she replied, "if it had not been so. I should have trusted you that *now* it was me you loved, and all the same I should have"

She paused and blushed; and some minutes passed, while Nigel, delighted, endeavoured, and in vain, to make her pronounce the words "loved you." He

resumed, however, at last—"You may say that, Anne; but if you feel at all like me, you cannot really think so. I think very much of a first love. I think there is something in it quite different from all other loves; and I can tell you, Anne, you ought to prize it; for there are not many men who, at four-and-twenty, could say what I do."

"No, nor women either," she said, tremblingly. "Women go into the world, as well as men; and when people meet . . ."

"Oh! with women it is quite another thing," he interrupted, hastily. "One expects to find first love in women. They may go into the world, but they have not at all the same temptations."

"But you speak as if there was harm in it," she continued. "There is no harm in having loved before."

"*Harm!*" he said, pronouncing the word doubtfully. "Well, I don't say there is harm, that is according to circumstances; but, if there is not harm, there is a great want of charm. Do you know that I feel so strongly on the subject, that when I was young, not more than nineteen, I made a sort of a vow that I would only marry one who was—who was, in short, like you."

"It was a very foolish vow to make, I think," she said, tremulously.

"I don't say the vow was wise, but if you call the feeling foolish, it shews that you don't understand the subject in the least." And he spoke more dictatorially than was quite suitable to a lover of a day old.

"I think I do," Anne began again, making one more effort. "I . . ."

"Then I should be very sorry to think you did," he said, shortly.

And Anne became dumb. Fear entered her heart, as well as love ; and she felt powerless to fight with it. They walked on in silence, Nigel not perfectly pleased at having been contradicted. They walked in silence, till the silence terrified Anne, and she said, "Will you read to me to-day? Could you not read under the trees?"

"I could, if you like it," he said, eagerly. "Should you really like it?" And, on her earnest acquiescence, added, "Oh! dear Anne, how happy we shall be!"

He flew back to the house for a volume of Shakespeare and a warm shawl; and having placed Anne on the shawl under the trees, he threw himself beside her, and

read. An hour or more flew by while thus he read and commented, and she listened and appreciated; an hour so full of enjoyment to both, that Anne again forgot her secret, until it was a second time recalled by Nigel's words. They were strolling homewards.

"Yes," he replied, in answer to her rapturous admiration of what he had read (it had been some selected passages from the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'). "Yes, I always think there is nothing like Shakespeare, and there is almost more poetry in this play than in any other. Yet it is not my favourite. I never quite reconcile myself to all the changing. It is a matter-of-fact way of discussing Shakespeare's fairy play, but I never can quite agree to the union of Helena and Demetrius. If I had been

Helena, I never could have believed him true."

"I am afraid you have very little trust," Anne said, softly. Her heart was beating with the desire of confession, and the dread of it; but her quiet manners shewed little of the inward agitation.

"Yes, perfect trust," he said, gazing fondly in her lovely face, and supposing the fitting blush to proceed from his gazing; "but, perhaps, a jealous trust."

"To be jealous is not to trust," she argued, still hovering on the borders of confession, instead of plunging in.

"I don't know. I am not so sure of that. One may be jealous from dread of losing a particle of one's treasure, and yet never have a fear that we could lose it."

"I trust you perfectly," Anne said, "past as well as future."

"And so I trust you, my dearest; but—it is no use denying it, and so I may as well say it out—I think I *could* be jealous."

Anne sighed. But when he playfully asked her why, there was such undoubting confidence in the playful tone, such thankful and happy mirth in his jesting about his jealousy, that she could not destroy it; and she flew to her room, after his departure, with her small trouble grown to a mountain of misery.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Chi ama, teme.

MR. HARCOURT accepted the invitation to Brackleigh which Mr. Hope dispatched a few days after his party. He saw a momentary brightness in his wife's face at the mention of Katherine and Brackleigh, and though the dread of strangers made her afterwards object to the plan, he determined not to yield to what were evidently the suggestions of nervousness.

Almost the saddest feeling Katherine had ever experienced was the feeling with which she saw again her early friend. To the troubles of some people we can reconcile ourselves. Those whom prosperity has made selfish and careless; those who have apparently had no exquisite sense of happiness; a feeling of justice for the one, and a hope that the sense of pain will not be keener than that of pleasure for the other, reconcile us to their troubles; and though we compassionate, we do not suffer in our compassion. But with those whose joy has been radiant and perfect, those whom prosperity, so far from making selfish, has so filled with thankfulness, that their life has been, like incense daily offered to Him who gave them all, it is far

otherwise. The sorrows of such persons trouble our spirits; shake our trust in the perfect wisdom and love of God; afflict us, in short, with keen pangs, such as are brought by a personal misery.

"You will find her terribly altered," Harcourt said to Katherine, as he took her up to Caroline's room, an hour or two after their arrival at Brackleigh. "I am afraid there must be something wrong in the way in which we have taken this trial; we ought to submit more than we do; and yet, though I preach to Caroline," he added, his eyes filling with tears, "I am almost as bad as she is. She was such a darling child, and would have been such a comfort to us if she had lived."

Katherine could only give her words

of earnest sympathy; but they were so softly and warmly given, that Harcourt said, "I have so often wished to send for you, to ask you, at least, to come to us, but I was afraid it was useless."

"I am afraid it would have been," she replied.

"Why, are you still entirely wedded to your sisters?" he asked, with a smile. .

Katherine blushed. "I *could* leave them, of course," she said; "but I think I never should have a moment's peace if I did."

"But they will leave you. Anne, at least, will. Then you will be freer."

"Perhaps yes," she replied, but did not encourage further conversation on the subject.

The alteration in Caroline amounted to

a total change. Everything like animation had faded from her face, and the bloom of youth, the smiling eyes, the light and play of her countenance, were as entirely gone as if a score or two of years had passed.

She met Katherine with calm composure, and in a dull, joyless voice conversed with her about her own journey and the events at Sandlands; asking questions, and, with wan face and glassy eyes, waiting to be answered.

Katherine could not bear this long. "Oh! Caroline, how you are changed!" she burst out.

A convulsive movement trembled in Caroline's features for a moment, and seemed to threaten a disturbance of her dull tranquillity, but she mastered it and

said, "I have had enough to change me; you know—no, you don't know, no one can—what we have suffered. But it was just. I was too happy, and I was punished for it."

"Not punished for being happy, surely," Katherine said, in her earnest but down-right manner.

"Do you think not?" And Caroline looked up arrested.

"I am sure of it. No one can be too happy, if happiness is given them."

"Do you think not?" Caroline repeated, her eyes opening with a look of interest. "But why then"

"Perhaps your happiness was so great that you needed to be reminded of another happiness beyond; and, if so, then surely you were mercifully reminded, even by the loss of your treasures."

"My best treasure," she said, in a broken voice.

"Oh! Caroline, no," Katherine cried, "you cannot say that; not your best treasure."

Caroline looked at her again, and then burst into a passion of tears. "No, no," she exclaimed, "I see what you mean; not my best; he might have been taken, but he is spared me. How ungrateful I have been!"

It was many weeks, Katherine afterwards found, since Caroline had shed a tear, a dull stupor having settled upon all her powers. The return to Brackleigh, the sight of Katherine, her sympathy, and even her few plain words, all these things together broke the spell, and a better day seemed about to arise.

When, an hour or two afterwards, Harcourt re-entered the room, she startled him by the smile with which she met him, and thanked him for bringing her to Brackleigh.

"You have done us good already," Harcourt said, as he carefully put Katherine back in the pony carriage; "I knew you would."

"She cannot help it, it is her commission to do good," observed Mr. Hope, with a smile; for he also stood at the door.

Harcourt glanced quickly from one to the other, but the calm face of Mr. Hope, and Katherine's answer, put to flight a suspicion that arose.

"I don't know why you say that, Mr. Hope. I am sure you have no reason."

The suspicion, however, recurred again;

and, after he had passed a few days at Brackleigh, Harcourt said, one evening, to his wife, "Do you see anything going on here, Caroline?"

Caroline had improved in spirits and general tone of mind since the first day of her arrival. Some higher *thoughts of the duty of acquiescence in the dispensations of Him who ordered her life; some merely natural effects of change, and society pleasing to her, concurred in animating her moral and physical being; and her husband had seen, with joy, that something of interest in life was rekindled in her mind. She now smiled like her old self, and said, "If you mean something about Mr. Hope, yes."

"Mr. Hope and Katherine."

"Nothing in Katherine. Mr. Hope is

in love with *her*, or, at least, thinks a good deal about her ; but I don't think she sees it, or cares about him."

"It would be the very thing for her," Harcourt said. "If one could picture out a destiny for her, it would be this."

"But you* forget Mr. Trevethlan," Caroline cried, in eager alarm.

"I don't forget him, but I am tired of thinking of him. He never says a word, and here is Katherine slaving away at her sisters just as she did six years ago. Why should we think of him, if they do not think of each other? Did he say anything to you the night we passed through London?"

"No. I told him of Anne's marriage, and I fancied his countenance changed a little, but he said nothing. Still he is

unmarried, when he *ought* to marry; and I think he is waiting for her."

"Such a perfect husband for her Mr. Hope would be."

"But not if she likes Mr. Trevethlan," Caroline said, determinedly.

"Their liking, my dear Caroline, must be a very fanciful thing. Six years ago they met about a dozen times, and then Katherine refused him. Since then they have had no communication. That kind of fancy could easily yield to a present lover, I should imagine."

"Do you think so?"—doubtfully.

"I do, indeed. Such a lover as Mr. Hope would make. I did not think so at first. I thought he liked her, but was too calm and impassive to touch a woman's heart; but last night I changed my mind. When

he was telling us about his early youth, and his making up his mind to leave Brackleigh, how he spoke ! I never saw such a change in any man : his voice, and manner, and countenance became . . . I am not a novelist, to describe what ; but I only know I said to myself, if that is the way in which you speak of love, no woman could resist you."

"Do you think so?" Caroline repeated, in alarm. "Yes ; I know what you mean. Poor Mr. Trevethlan ! I think I must write and give him a hint."

"My dear Caroline, I beg you will do no such thing. We must think of Katherine's happiness ; and what could be so happy for her as to be settled here, by that poor Rosé, whom, I am very much afraid, she will never like to leave?"

"But if she and Mr. Trevethlan have liked each other for six years, I cannot bear to think of it."

"If they have liked each other *really* for six years, there will be no need. Mr. Hope will have no chance."

Caroline thought for a moment, and then said, "Poor Mr. Hope! I don't wish him to be disappointed again, for I am certain he must have been so once. I think, as I am here, I might give *him* a hint, before he sets his heart entirely upon her."

"Oh! women! women! Will they never leave things alone?" Harcourt burst out. "My dear Caroline, pray be still, and give no hints to any one. We should be very bad arbiters of destiny, any of us, I believe, if we took events into our own hands; and a hint to either might cause

irreparable injury. Let things take their own way. They will find a better way than you could make for them by meddling."

"I think, without meddling, a word in season, from a real friend, may sometimes do good. But you need not be afraid; I will not give one hint if you think it better not. I shall try, though, some day, to find out what Katherine wishes."

Katherine was in the habit of talking, with tolerable freedom, to Mrs. Frankland, and of asking her advice on many small occasions when advice was wanted; but her intercourse with her was too habitual, and, for the most part, too public to have anything of the free and fearless charm she found in her communications with Caroline. The six years of absence, and

the change in Caroline, had made no change in the strong fancy which had originally attracted Katherine's affections towards her; and, in conversation with her, the moments slipped by with a marvellous velocity. She was generally a listener. A good listener; a real listener is a rare thing. Many, out of duty, or kindness, or simple curiosity, listen with their ears; but few listen with their hearts; and this Katherine did; and this gave a charm to her society it might not otherwise have possessed. None who have troubles can resist the attraction of pouring out their griefs to one who really has "ears to hear." But Caroline now wished to hear as well as to speak; and one day, putting aside her own sorrows, she determined to draw out Katherine's feelings.

"I don't think I have yet said, Katherine," she began, "how much admiration I feel at the way in which you have brought up your sisters. I can hardly fancy happier thoughts than you must have when you see them turning out so amiable, so lovely, so everything that can be wished, except, indeed, poor Rose's health."

Katherine looked grave. "I am glad to see them as they are," she said, "but I am far from feeling what you describe. I have done, I think I have done what I could, so far as I saw; but I have not done all that I now see ought to have been done."

"That is morbid. You scold me for being morbid, but, surely, you are so now."

"I think not," Katherine said, earnestly.

"I say I tried to do what I could. I am sure, in general, I did; not quite always, but *in general*; but it frightens me now to see how little that was. I hope, on a very sincere wish, some blessing will rest; but when you speak of my bringing them up, I see how terribly wanting I have been."

"I do not see it. I see exactly the reverse. What can be so perfect, so admirable, as the cheerful patience with which poor Rose bears her great trial? And as to Anne, I never saw a young girl, in her circumstances, so modest, so unselfish, so thoughtful, in short, so perfect."

"Poor Rose has been well taught," Katherine replied, in the same grave tone, "but not by me. She had her

faults, and, in vain, I grieved over them. I could do nothing. Circumstances, not of my ordering, have softened and formed her; and I will own that I do look at her with admiration and wonder. I am *thankful*; but I feel humbled, not proud. And with Annie still less do I feel satisfied with myself."

"Oh! Katherine, you are a self-tormentor."

"No, I took even more pains with Annie than with Rose. She laid herself entirely in my hands, to do with as I pleased; but I have done nothing. What she is, she was naturally; and the natural fault she has, has grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength."

"What fault? I see none."

"Annie is weak; and the more I

think, the more I see that to be weak is a fault, and a grievous one. 'Be strong, and of a good courage;' that is what I feel inclined to say to every one, as Joshua did. Life's happiness is contained in the words. If I had thought about this when Annie was younger, I might have done more than I did."

Caroline looked in her face, earnest with the words she said, and observed, "You seem more full of care about your sisters now than you used to be, Katherine. I used to wonder how lightly you bore the burden."

"It is different to deal with children and with grown up girls," Katherine said, smiling, but gravely still. "A word of advice to a child, even if not the wisest, can do no great harm. But now I weigh.

my words, dreading lest I should, in any way, mislead; and I fear I sometimes do."

"You are *quite* pleased with Anne's marriage, are you not?" Caroline asked, anxiously.

"Yes, quite. I think she ought to be perfectly happy." But though Katherine's words were unhesitating, there was not undoubting certainty in the manner.

"I think you ought to be pleased. Henry has had a great deal of talk with Mr. Grey, and you cannot think how highly he speaks of him. He says he *never* met so high-principled a young man; or one so bent on doing good, and being useful in the world. I know one evening he said very gravely that Mr. Grey made him ashamed of himself; and he only wished he had been as good when he was young.

He thinks you immensely lucky, Katherine."

"I think the same, and am very thankful for it. I only wish . . . It is, perhaps, an odd thing to say, but sometimes I think, if he was not quite so perfect, Annie would be happier. I think already she is afraid of him, and I don't like fear—that kind of fear—for a wife."

"No, certainly not," was Caroline's warm reply.

"He has no indulgence. He owns it; he says he does not approve of it. One day, feeling very sure that a girl of Annie's age must sometimes have a folly or a fault, I tried to lead him to see it, and to draw from him a promise of indulgence; but he was not pleased with me. He likes to think her perfect; and said, very

seriously, that if we thought less indulgently of our weakness, and more of what we ought to be, we should all be the better for it."

"And that is true, Katherine," Caroline said, humbly; "at least, I am sure it is with me."

"Yes, it is true . . . but still . . . I certainly wish he was less strict in his notions of perfection, for Annie's sake. However, I hope it may all be for her good in the end."

"The fact is, dear Katherine, you are too anxious. You have had so much anxiety all your life, that it has done you harm. Will this never end? Will you tell me, do you never think of marriage, and being cared for yourself, in return for all your cares?"

Katherine blushed deeply; and, to Caroline, that blush was a sufficient answer. She replied, however, "We have many thoughts we would rather not have, and such thoughts had better not be spoken about. Don't ask me such questions, unless you wish to 'give me pain.'"

"I do not ask from curiosity. I think the time is come when you might please yourself"

"But I wish for no change," Katherine said, quickly. "What will come, will come. I don't wish for temptation."

"Why *temptation*? Do you mean to tie yourself for ever to Rose? Henry says he is terribly afraid you do; but I think it would be wrong."

"I have not thought," Katherine said, with some agitation, "Why should I think?

Let the future alone. It is time enough to reflect if temptation comes."

Caroline sat thoughtful for a few minutes, and then said, "How is it, Katherine, that I should wish to put one I care for in a position in which she might suffer such agony as I have gone through? and yet I do wish it."

But here Katherine, glad to escape from personal talk, led the conversation into a new channel; and she and her secret thoughts were left in peace.

CHAPTER XXV.

Le mentir est le premier de tous les maux.

Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable.

PARADISE LOST.

Oh ! what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive,

AND if the word conceal would rhyme
as well, the sense would be as good.
For concealment not only distorts the
proportions of the thing concealed in our
own eyes ; not only makes large what
was small ; but, by concealment, the thing
itself changes its character, and becomes

no longer a concealment, but a deception. So many words are said, which, were the thing known, would not be said; so many inferences must be allowed to be drawn, which, from the character of the thing concealed, are therefore false; that conversation on the most unconnected topics, that life itself becomes a continued falsehood. Such being the case, it is difficult to conceive how any ingenuous mind can enter, or far less continue in, so tortuous a course. It seems impossible that any lover of truth can willingly suffer, for one hour, the torture such concealment must inevitably bring. But there is a plea which not in concealment only, but as regards all faults, smooths the way and quiets the conscience; the plea of delay. Go thy

way for this time, is man's constant address to his troubled and warning conscience; when I have a convenient season I will obey thee. It was thus that Anne Dacre lived on in tolerable quietness, under the weight of a secret, which, through concealment, had changed from a folly to a deliberate deception. Few were the days in which Nigel's words did not wound her to the quick; few the days in which her passive reception of his words did not involve her deeper in falsehood; but while her courage failed for immediate confession, she calmed herself by her resolutions for the future. Since she had failed at first, she must now watch for an opportunity; she must wait for confession

till he knew her better, and would trust her more entirely.

It was not without reason that Katherine had spoken doubtfully to Caroline of Anne's future happiness. A few days previously she had heard some words between her and Nigel, which had annoyed her enough to make a fresh appeal to Anne, and the result of that appeal had left a vague dread upon her mind.

It was a rainy day, and Katherine and Rose had established themselves in the room still called the school-room, that the drawing-room might be left free to the lovers. There Anne kept such books as were her private property, and there, in the course of the afternoon, she

brought Nigel to inspect them. Being one of so small a family, the number of presents she had received were few, and two shelves hanging against the wall contained all her store.

Nigel inspected them with the interest of a book-fancier, and as he took out one after the other, gave his opinions upon them. "Most of Walter Scott's poems I see; and well read, that I see also; I am glad of it; I like you to like them; it is a style of poetry very good for young girls. I do not much care to read them to myself, but we will read them over again together, and I am sure it will be a pleasure to both of us."

He passed on, and, with equal condescension, acknowledged the merits of Cowper, and Southey's *Thalaba*.

"Byron!" he next said, taking from the shelf a single volume of selected poems from that author. "Where did you get that, Annie?"

"Mr. Frankland brought it me from London. I like it; don't you?" And she looked timidly up in his doubtful face.

"Well," he said, making the one syllable as long as twenty, "I see no great harm here. Byron's poetry is fine. I should be a fool if I said otherwise; and, being so, I suppose it is right and proper to make ourselves acquainted with it, in a degree; but if you ask me if I like it, I must own I don't. Though the poetry is fine, the general tone is false, and I am so formed that I *cannot* like anything false. It is a feeling born

with me ; anything approaching to falsehood revolts me at once, and for ever."

He spoke with warmth. A heavy book on the lower shelf at this moment fell to the ground, and Anne stooped to pick it up. As she raised it, Katherine, whose eyes had instinctively turned upon her, saw her cheek was crimson.

Nigel saw it also, and with a voice and manner of caressing fondness, hastened to relieve her of the book. "Why, Annie, what a fly you are ; is *this* too heavy for you ? You are quite breathless, you poor little thing ! Why didn't you ask me to pick it up ?"

"It was not that," Anne said, always protesting against the false inference, though unable to correct it.

"So you always say. She will never

first, I sometimes think it will be best to wait till he is sure—till I have convinced him that he only is my” She paused, ever unable to express her feelings as regarded Nigel.

“And how long will it take to convince him?” Katherine asked, with great seriousness.

“I cannot tell. He ought to know it now. Every night I say to myself that he must trust me, and that I will do it to-morrow; but, when to-morrow comes, something makes me afraid; and I am almost tired of promising myself now.”

“But, Annie, dear, I must ask again, how long is this to go on? Are you to go on promising and deceiving all your life?”

“All my life! Oh! Katherine, no;”

with a shudder. "Do you think I could live with this weight on my mind?"

"But when, then?"

Anne blushed deeply, and turned away her head as she answered, "Sometimes I think it will be best to leave it till we are married; then he may be angry, he may cease to love me, but nothing can separate us for ever. Now" she stopped again, and clasped her hands together, as if in anguish of mind.

Katherine looked at her with pity, but, after some thought, said, with still greater seriousness, "There is one thing, Annie, I think you forget. You make Nigel the only rule and judge, by which you guide your conduct. You do not seem to me to remember that you are answerable to another judge, and that it is against His

law of perfect truth that you are offending. Am I too severe?" she added, tenderly, seeing tears in her sister's eyes.

"No, Katherine," Anne replied, humbly. "You are only right. I know it is true. I think of Nigel's anger till I forget all besides."

"But, dear Annie, you will not let it be so? You will do it now at once; will you not? Or, again, I ask, shall I do it for you? I know it will not be the best way, but anything is better than going on as now you do; and as once I kept you from speaking, I seem to have more excuse for speaking now."

"Never, with my will," Anne said, with a warmth and impetuosity unusual to her manners. "He may cease to love me, but he shall not despise me."

There was but little more conversation, for the arguments proceeded in a circle, ever returning to the same point. But it was no wonder that a painful impression was left on Katherine's mind.

The rainy afternoon at Sandlands, which caused this discomfort to Katherine, passed pleasantly, nay, rapturously to Nigel. Among Anne's books he had lighted on a German one, and his fancy for teaching her German recurred to his mind. He proposed a lesson; and he had but to propose, and Anne was pleased. His will had become her will; his soul had passed into hers. The lesson began, and so apt and docile was his lovely pupil, and so perfect seemed his method of instruction, that, pleased alike with himself and her, the hours flew by on silken wings.

He strode home to Mr. Frankland's (where, during the visit of the Harcourts to Brackleigh, he had taken up his abode), through drenching rain and soaking fields, with a light heart, and a joyous step; and, with his joyous heart beaming in his face, he entered the drawing-room.

Mr. and Mrs. Frankland were gone to dress. Janet, who for the chance of a talk with Nigel, often performed her toilet in a marvellously short time, was lingering in the drawing-room. She was lying back idly in a chair, and the light of two candles, though but dim, shewed the dreariness of her face, as well as the brightness of Nigel's.

As her eyes fell upon him, the happy expression struck her forcibly, and she turned pale.

"You look dismal, Janet," he said, gaily.
"What is the matter?"

"A rainy day," she replied. "You know how I hate to be kept at home. What have you done with yourself?"

"Done! I have been too happy. What does a rainy day matter? To be sure, I cannot expect it should be to you as it was with me; but some day I hope you will know that when one is happy, perfectly, cloudlessly happy, no frowning of Nature can affect one's happiness." And his blue eyes shone like the stars on a frosty night, so flashing with gladness.

"When are you to be married, Nigel?" Janet asked, shortly.

"I don't know," he replied.

Her face brightened, and she sat upright and said, laughing, "I thought you were

coming to tell me it was settled. I thought that was the cause of your being so terribly happy to-day."

"No. Those settlements are still making a bother. Mr. Dacre is *exigeant*, and though I don't care a straw what is settled, my father does. So they write lengthy epistles to Mr. Heywood, which Mr. Heywood forwards; and then they answer Mr. Heywood, and he forwards their answers; and so they go on. It is a worry, but Anne and I are too happy to make a fuss about it. We mean to be so happy all our lives, that we can afford to wait awhile. Now, Janet," he added, suddenly, "will you not confess that I have made a good choice? Come, do." His desire for her approval was very strong. He often endeavoured to surprise it from her.

"Look at your wet boots!"

"Never mind my boots. Do confess that I knew what I was about when I chose Anne."

"I don't believe you knew a bit," she replied, playfully. "You fell in love with a pretty face, just as others do."

"But you must remember I have seen many pretty faces in my life, and yet I never fell in love with them."

"I don't think you ever looked at one before. You looked only at your books."

"At any rate, Janet, I saw yours," he said, provoked.

She winced, but answered as lightly as before, "And if I had given you any encouragement you would have been in love with me."

"This is nonsense. I fell in love with

Anne Dacre because I saw her faultless nature shining in the most lovely face ever seen on this earth. She is perfect; and I am sure I thank God daily that I came here when I did, and chose her when I did. Another year, and it might have been too late."

"Yes," Janet said, with serious thought.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, quickly.

"Because I think another year would have been too late for *you*."

"Why?" he impatiently asked.

"Why! Because, like many young girls, I think Anne Dacre would always have been in love. If she has not been so already, she would soon have been, and Mr. Hope or Alexander Roper would soon have carried off your prize."

"What you say is false," he cried, angrily, "and I would have you remember that Anne is going to be my wife, and is to be respected as such." And he walked out of the drawing-room, closing the door with a bang.

Janet smiled, and lightly sprang up the stairs to her own room.

To Mr. Frankland's habits a rainy day, in which no single new fact could be collected, was very irksome, and though hardly out of temper, to irritate Nigel was certainly an unusual enjoyment. Having drawn from him some account of the occupations of the day, and, with apparent interest, listened to his comments on Anne Dacre's quickness, he proceeded to tease him, with overmuch perseverance on his perfections as a tutor lover. Nigel

grew angry at last, and, to escape from him, started up and said he must write to his mother.

He began his letter by telling her that the cause of his writing at that moment, was that a rainy day had made Mr. Frankland and Janet cross ; and from thence he turned to the difference in his own feeling regarding the day, and, possibly because Janet, for once, had not responded to his mood, poured out to his mother, in a strain fuller and freer than was common to him, the overflowing love and gladness he felt in his heart, enlarging on Anne's perfections in a true lover's way.

In about a week Mrs. Grey answered him, and more at length than was common. The usual style of her letters, written with one child on her knee,

and another on her back, was such as this.

"My dearest dear boy. I was glad to hear of your being well and happy. All well at home. Write soon again to,

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE MOTHER."

But on this occasion, touched possibly by the fervent happiness of his tone, she devoted to him a quiet hour, and entered into his feelings with warmth; accepting his account of Anne's perfections, dwelling on them, and picturing the happiness she anticipated in receiving such a being as a daughter. After this ebullition of sympathy, she concisely added a few words of home news. "All well, and pleased with Tenby. Gertrude the better for bathing. The boys very happy, with a new acquaintance just made, a Mr. Norman Montague, who

seems as mad about boating as they are. Tenby is very full."

Nigel was much pleased with his mother's letter. The conciseness of those hitherto received, regarding Anne and his prospects, had pained him. He understood his mother, and knew it was habit, and not want of affection; but no letter yet received had appeared to him sufficiently warm and interested to give to a daughter-in-law as a picture of her mother-in-law. With this one no such fault could be found; tone and style were alike perfect, and he hastened, in the first moment of privacy, to place it in Anne's hands.

They were sitting in the window of the drawing room, Anne half shrouded in the curtains, Nigel, as it pleased him to be, on a low chair, at her feet. He gave her

the letter, and, while she read, alternately glanced at her, watching her countenance, and worked away at a nob of wood he was carving; an occupation which, being naturally indisposed to idleness, and having a turn for mechanical arts, he had taken up during the time of courtship.

With several glances he was well pleased; soft, fitting smiles and blushes giving additional loveliness to her face. But, on the last page, a glow of the most intense crimson succeeded these more tranquil signs of delight.

“What is the matter now, Annie?” he asked, playfully; then remembering a quotation from his own letter regarding Anne—a very rapturous description of her personal charms—in the strong confidence of devoted affection, he added, “Ah! I

guess; but, dearest, you really must learn to like praise, and to hear that you are an angel; you must like it from *me*, I mean. You are too humble."

"It was not that," she cried, blushing still more painfully, "it was . . ." She hesitated, her poor heart was going round like a mill-wheel.

"It was my mother's comment on my words, I suppose you mean? That is being very precise; but I say it again, Annie, you must learn to know what you are, and to bear a few words of praise without trembling. I like you the better for it *now*, but still I do wish you to have a little confidence in yourself in future."

"Oh! Nigel. I wish you did not think so well of me," burst with almost a cry from her lips.

"Not think so well of you!" And he put down his nob of wood, and looked at her with some surprise and some displeasure. "My dear Annie, if you please, what do you mean? If I did not think so well of you, do you suppose I should care for you as I do? I chose you to be my wife because, as far as I could judge, and I never had reason to distrust my judgment, I thought you were as nearly perfect as human nature can be. I am so formed that I can only love what is right, and pure, and good. Some do not care for perfection; I do. And, dearest,"—and he paused to lay his hand gently on her hand—"I know I have found it, and I am happy; how happy you cannot tell." And there shot that radiant flash from his eye,

which so altered the whole character of his countenance.

“But, Nigel”—and now there was a tear on her lashes—“I am not what you think. You will be disappointed. I am not perfect—very, very far from it.”

“Annie,” he said, in a tone of annoyance and grave displeasure, “I must beg you to have done with such foolish self-depreciating speeches. God forbid that I should wish you to be proud or conceited; such is very far from my meaning; but I must tell you plainly that if you wish to shake my love, or to alter that perfect trust I have in you, it will be by speeches such as these. Either you are an acting hypocrite, and have wilfully deceived me, or else,—” and here the stern tone softened, and a sweet smile played on his lips, “I

have some little reason, in many weeks of perfect happiness, to say I know what you are, and to be satisfied."

A burning blush followed the words "wilful hypocrite," and a tear followed the softened voice and confident expression of happiness and trust; but no other word was said. An abyss of misery yawned before her, so Anne felt, at least; but there was no strength in her to meet again that severe look. She remained silent, and Nigel worked away at his carving, till, the excitement on both sides having passed by, he began cheerfully to tell her of a conversation he had had with Mrs. Frankland that morning on housekeeping, and the many pieces of good advice she had given him.

It was a calm ending, and Anne was

so far a hypocrite that she bore her part in it with tolerable calmness; but when Nigel was gone, she went to Katherine, and, with expressions of the utmost dejection and despair, told her what had occurred. *That name*; the strangeness of its meeting her again thus; the certainty of its pursuing her.

Katherine looked at her with the sincerest pity. That all this trouble originated in Anne's own folly could not make her sympathy less; for it requires very little experience to teach that the worst trials are those our own errors or follies bring. She could very well fancy the present agony of Anne's conscientious, loving, and timid mind; and, with many affectionate and convincing words, she entered into her misery; but, at the same time, exhorted

her to confession, without one more moment's delay.

"I cannot do it," was Anne's passionate reply. "I tried—oh! Katherine, if you had heard me, you would know how I tried to tell him; but I could not; and now he plainly says that if I were not as perfect as he has fancied I am, he shall love me no more." And she clasped her hands together in an attitude of despair.

"If I were you, Annie," Katherine said, gravely, "I would rather be loved no more than deceive, even for an hour, one I cared for as you do for Nigel."

"To be loved no more! oh! Katherine, you don't know what you say. I cannot, dare not face it. Besides," she added, after a moment's pause, "it would be so mean now to do from terror what I did not do

from duty. He would despise me as I should despise myself."

"But you think only of Nigel, Annie; you do not think of what is right in itself. If it is wrong, however involuntarily, to deceive, then confession should be made, even though your delay has robbed it of its grace. Dear Annie, do be brave, and delay no more."

"There will be little delay," she replied, gloomily, "it will come too soon. I see it coming."

Katherine sighed. Not so much at the possible trouble impending over her sister's fate, as at the too probable deterioration awaiting her character, supposing the discovery not to be made. "*The mystery of iniquity.*" Those are awful words; such as no one who has witnessed the effect of

a wilful fault in child or man, however small, can fail to dwell upon with fear; the small fault, no bigger than a man's hand, can soon cloud over a whole heaven of virtue.

The conviction that immediate discovery was at hand, so haunted Anne, that, for the next few days, the sound of Nigel's approaching step threw her into a state of breathless agitation; an agitation that must have surprised him, had he not interpreted it in a manner most flattering to himself, supposing it to be the expression of her delight in his presence.

When, however, some days passed without further mention of Nigel's mother, Anne felt as if she was respited; and, relieved from the fear of discovery, began again to revolve her fruitless desires to confess.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Non sempre la luna sta in tondo.

*Do not the flowers spring fresh and gay,
Pleasant and sweet in the month of May?
And when their time cometh they fade away.*

ONE morning, it was about ten days after the reception of the letter that had agitated Anne, Mr. Frankland, who ruled with some tyranny over the post bag, dealt out, at breakfast, three or four letters to Nigel, and one to Janet. The remaining contents of the bag were for

his wife, and to her, who was not well, and was breakfasting in her own room, he carried them, leaving Nigel and Janet alone.

Nigel glanced over the outsides of his letters, then selecting one from his mother, a very thick one, observed, laughingly, "My dear mother! you are certainly learning to amend your ways." In hastily opening it an enclosure fell on the floor, at the moment unperceived by him.

The beginning of the letter was from his sister Gertrude, who, owing to the death of two children in their infancy, stood next to himself in the family. She was a childish girl of fourteen or fifteen, who contemplated Nigel with admiring awe, but preferred to follow in

the less intellectual and more boisterous footsteps of her younger brothers.

"MY DEAREST NIGEL,

Mamma was just going to write to you, but Herbert has cut a great gash across his hand, with his big knife, and she is gone away to dress it. She told me I might write to you instead, and she says I may tell you such an odd thing. She says she told you the other day that we had made a very nice new acquaintance. Herbert and Jemmy were the ones who made it, because he is always down on the beach, as they are. His name is Mr. Norman Montague, and he is a most *delightful* person, very good-looking, and *so* fond of boats. He has got a wife and a baby here, a very nice baby for such a small thing; but

we don't like his wife, because we think she is cross to him, and she don't care about boating the least. Well, the odd thing I was going to tell you is, that he knows Miss A. D. Mamma says I am not to call her Miss any more, but I cannot call a person that I have never seen by her name, can I? And he says she is much the most beautiful person in the world, and how he came to know her was something to do with a boat, but as he only told this to Herbert and Jemmy, I can't remember what it was. Don't you call it very odd? And Herbert says that when they told him you were going to be married to her, he got quite red, and *they* think he wanted to marry her himself; of course before he married. Perhaps I ought not to say this, but

they did not tell me not, and I daresay there is no harm."

Here Gertrude's letter came to a sudden end, and Nigel put it down, looking red, perplexed, and disturbed.

"Did you ever hear of a person called Norman Montague?" he asked of Janet.

"Never," she replied.

"Oh! then it is impossible." And he looked much relieved.

"What is impossible?"

"That he should know Anne, as Gertrude says he does."

"Not at all impossible that she should know a person I don't know. She may have met him at Sidmouth."

"At Sidmouth!" And his brows knit. "Ah! I recollect they said they had been there."

"Of course they were, for six months or more."

Nigel said no more, but took up the next sheet of his letter.

"MY DEAREST BOY,

. " I was called away just as I was going to write to you, and have not now much time ; but for several days I have wished to tell you the pleasure it has given your father and me to hear the account we have lately heard of the family you intend to make a part of our own. I told Gertrude she might relate the curious coincidence of our meeting with a person who knows your dear Anne ; but I must tell you, myself, that the terms in which he speaks, not of her only, but of her father and her elder sister, have added, if anything could add,

to our happiness in your approaching marriage. Not, my dear boy, that we did not trust your account, but lovers may be allowed a little exaggeration, and it is gratifying to find that an unprejudiced person speaks in the very same terms that a lover does.

“When, however, I say unprejudiced, I may use a wrong word, for the boys will have it that he has been a lover as well as yourself; and, though I say nonsense to them, I think it very possible, from several little circumstances I have remarked. If this is the case, however, you probably know all about it, unless indeed dear Anne is too modest to disclose her conquests. I am afraid he must have made a bad exchange, for Mrs. Montague, though handsome and agreeable

in company, has not a good-tempered expression, and, under the circumstances, I think his way of speaking of Anne is very chivalrous. We have made several acquaintances at Tenby, but the boys and Gertrude care for none but the Montagues."

Nigel put down the letter. "How old was Anne when she was at Sidmouth?" he asked, abruptly.

"About sixteen, or sixteen and a half."

"Then it is ridiculous."

"What is ridiculous? What is the matter, Nigel; why do you look so odd?"

"My mother, thinking, I suppose, to please me, as if my love for Anne needed any man's sanction, tells me of a lover she thinks she has discovered; but it is impossible."

"Not at all impossible. I have always suspected that there had been something, some business of the kind at Sidmouth."

"What?" Nigel said, turning his head to her as if he had been shot.

"How ridiculous you are, Nigel. Why, a girl like Anne was sure to have lovers, even if she did not fall in love herself, at a watering-place. You know *you* could not help looking at her as she passed, though *your* eyes are so very discreet."

Nigel made no answer; but, perceiving he had not finished his letter, glanced at the postscript. It was this:—

"My dear Nigel, Mamma is gone out; but she told me to send her letter. Just as I was sealing it Mrs. Montague came in, and begged me to put in the letter I send, to Miss A. D. What can it be

about? I am *sure* the boys are right, though perhaps I ought not to make remarks. YOURS AFFECTIONATELY,

“GERTRUDE G.”

Nigel's cheek was now pale, and his fingers trembled. He turned restlessly over his letters to discover the enclosure of which his sister spoke. Janet, observing that he was in search of something, looked on the floor, and picked up the note, saying as she did so, “Whose writing is that? A man's hand, I am sure.”

Nigel took it and put it in his pocket ; then walked to the window ; then looked at the clock. It was still very early, too early to go to Sandlands, and, with lips pressed tightly together, he sat down in an arm-chair, and listlessly examined his other letters.

Seeing him so employed, Janet read her own letter, and was just finishing it when Mr. Frankland returned.

"Well, young people, what news?" he asked. "Well, Mr. Nigel, what does your mother say?"

"Nothing, sir," Nigel said, shortly.

"Nothing in all that thick letter? She is a singular woman."

"Nothing that concerns anybody but me."

Mr. Frankland looked put out, but turned to Janet. "And who was your letter from, Miss Janet?"

"From my father."

"Indeed! And what does he say?"

"I have only glanced at it." And Janet put her letter in her pocket.

"And what did you see when you glanced, pray?"

"Nothing of any importance, Uncle Frankland."

Mr. Frankland was standing in the middle of the room. His curiosity thus baffled, he muttered, "The patience of Job! one had need to have the patience of twenty Jobs to deal with the young people of this day." And he left the room again, banging the door behind him.

Janet looked at Nigel with a smile, but he, immersed in his own cogitations, was totally unconscious of having given offence.

In the course of the day Mrs. Frankland questioned Janet about her letter.

"Your uncle tells me you have heard from your father, Janet?"

"Yes, Aunt Eliza."

"It is some months, I think, since you have heard. What does he say?"

"He says very little ; nothing to repeat."

"That is to say, Janet, you do not mean to tell us. Why not say so at once?"

"I was afraid you would be offended," was Janet's reply.

"No, my love. The communications of a father and daughter are sacred. You need not fear my interference. Is your father well?"

"Yes, I think so. He says something about rheumatism ; but nothing serious, I am sure."

Mrs. Frankland asked no more on this point ; but, after a moment, said, "Was Nigel annoyed at anything this morning?"

"Yes," Janet replied, laughing. "Nigel

is so silly. Aunt Esther tells him of a lover of Anne Dacre's whom she has met with at Tenby, and he is as much annoyed as if she had said a husband."

"A lover of Anne's?" exclaimed Mrs. Frankland, in grave surprise. "How can that be?"

"I think, Aunt Eliza, I have better wits than any of you. I always thought there had been a lover at Sidmouth; I have seen it a hundred times in Anne's face; and now it seems I was right."

"There is nothing, I hope, to annoy Nigel. I do remember now that Katherine once spoke of the anxiety Anne's beauty caused her; but I thought she was needlessly anxious, and I paid little attention. There is nothing, I hope, that ought to offend."

"Oh ! no," Janet said, still laughing; "only everything of Nigel's is so sacred. He cannot bear to think that Anne has ever been seen by other eyes than his. He is very nearly jealous of Uncle Frankland and Mr. Hope."

Nigel, meanwhile, had set forth on his way to Sandlands. To postpone his visit till the usual hour of the afternoon was impossible to his agitated mind, but he waited until he had a good hope of escaping the notice of Mr. Dacre.

Many varied feelings occupied him as he walked along; occupied, agitated, maddened him. The calm and radiant delight which had hitherto attended his courtship was flown. He was so formed that the mere fact of his betrothed having been already loved by another was

painful to him. In the mere fact that another had already ruffled the mirror of her mind, that the words of another had already called a blush into her cheek, his jealous temper found food for irritation and even disquiet; but there was far more than this here. When it occurred to him that this lover might possibly, but for circumstances, have been a favoured one; when he reflected that possibly he had been wilfully deceived, his feet stamped along the grass in frenzied fury. So much did jealousy absorb his mind, that the deception itself was comparatively little felt. He was not calm enough to recall the thousand occasions on which he must have been misled; the one fear, as a

whole, made such a storm within, that the circumstances were forgotten.

He reached Sandlands about twelve, and walked straight into the drawing-room. Katherine and Rose were there alone.

"Where is Anne?" he asked, authoritatively.

He was told that she was somewhere in the garden, with the gardener. She was giving orders about some cuttings she wished to have made.

"That will do," he said, "I will go to her." And, without any apology for, or explanation of his sudden appearance, he stepped out of the window, throwing it wide open, with a hasty sound, and disappeared.

Katherine looked anxiously after him and sighed. It was evident that a day of misfortune was at hand.

Nigel crossed the garden with rapid steps, till he came suddenly on Anne and the gardener. He paused there, and looked at her before she perceived him, and his heart swelled as he gazed. A common shawl of shepherd's plaid was clasped round her throat, and a common coarse straw hat, with a blue ribbon, was on her head; but her beauty was of that perfect nature which is set off by every change of attire, and he felt as if he never before had prized or admired the inexpressible softness and grace of her air. It was in a gentler tone than he intended that he said, "Anne!"

She turned round, startled; and, with

her unquiet conscience already alarmed, blushed a painful blush.

He shook hands with her silently, and stood by, saying nothing. Nicholson, the gardener, also stood by, uncertain whether or not he was dismissed.

Anne was forced to speak. "I was arranging some things with Nicholson," she said, not daring to mention what things; "but he will come another time, if you want me."

He acquiesced with a silent nod; and, though trembling from head to foot, Anne forced herself to make another appointment with Nicholson, lest *he* should think Nigel ungracious.

He took off his hat, and left them; and Anne followed where Nigel led her. He said not a word till they reached a

seat at some distance from the house. He then waved his hand towards it, saying, "Sit down here, Anne. I want to speak to you."

She sat down thankfully, for fear and terror were making her heart, mentally and bodily, faint within her.

He also sat down; and, taking his mother's letter from his pocket, said, "I have had a letter from my mother, which has surprised me. Pray, Anne, did you ever hear of a person called Norman Montague?"

Anne became deadly pale; she moved her lips, as if to answer, yes, and Nigel's eyes grew fiercer, and his tone more cold.

"You did. Then may I further ask, if it is true that this Norman Montague was ever a lover of yours?"

She was totally unable to speak; every power of mind and body was paralyzed the sternness of his air. Her lips slightly moved again in acquiescence; but there was no sound.

"Silence gives consent," he said, with bitter irony. "Then I need have no scruple in giving this letter to its rightful owner."

He drew the enclosure from his pocket, and held it out. Anne's fingers were just able to grasp it before the dread of what that letter contained, extinguished the remaining vitality of her heart; as soon as she had firmly grasped it, she fainted away.

It is somewhere ironically said, that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she cannot do better than to *faint*; but if such a sight *has* been able to melt hard or

angry hearts, it certainly had no such effect on Nigel. He prevented her indeed from falling, and stretched her on the seat, but it was done as immoveably as if she had been a marble statue. There was no gentle touch as he laid down her head; no movement, no glance of tenderness, as he removed her hat, and disentangled from its strings a curl of glittering hair; and, having laid her down, he slowly crossed the garden, and put his head in at the drawing-room window.

"Anne has fainted, Katherine," was all he said, "you had better come to her."

He walked, with the same measured steps, back again; and Katherine, having only paused to get some Eau de Cologne, flew past him, as she hastened to her sister.

When he reached the seat, Katherine

had lifted Anne's head, and was bathing her temples with the Eau de Cologne ; but though no longer so deadly pale, there were no signs of animation in her countenance.

Nigel watched her for a moment, with the same passionless air ; and then said, "I have a right to see that letter, Katherine. If I had chosen I might have exercised the right before I called you ; but I chose to do it in your presence. I intend to read it now." And he put out his hand.

But Katherine prevented him. "There is no doubt Anne will shew you what you please," she said ; "but neither you nor I have a right to take advantage of her unconscious state."

"I believe you are all in a plot against me," he cried, passionately.

"Give it him!" Anne murmured; startled into life by the sound of his angry voice.

Katherine quietly handed him the letter, and he broke the seal, and read what it enclosed. *Anne's letter*. That letter which for many months had haunted her as a nightmare.

For the first time, Nigel became as pale as Anne. It was one thing to have suspicions; it was another to read, in the hand of his betrothed, the assurance of her attachment and fidelity to another. Unable to command himself, he walked away with hurried steps, and disappeared from sight.

Grieved for him, as well as for her sister, Katherine now longed to go after him, and explain all that could be ex-

plained. That she might be at liberty to do this, she more energetically endeavoured to arouse Anne from her stupor, rubbing her hands, and pouring a few drops of Eau de Cologne on her lips.

At this last remedy Anne opened her eyes and looked round, and seeing Katherine alone, sprang up with a cry, "Is Nigel gone?"

"Only this moment, dearest, and I want to go to him. Rouse yourself, if you can, Annie, and let me take you home."

Anne obediently roused herself, and sat up; and, after once again closing her eyes and leaning back with a look of utter despair, made an effort and stood on her feet.

"Now I am ready," she said, in her low, soft tones, "dear Katherine, take me in.

How much trouble I give, and how I grieve you all. Poor Nigel!"

She said no more while Katherine supported her home; nor did she make any opposition when her sister desired her to lie on the sofa in the school-room till her return. "I am going to explain it all to Nigel," Katherine said, leaning over her. "He is angry now, as well as unhappy; and you know, dear Annie, justly. Try and be ready to see him, and to speak with truth and courage, when I return."

"If he comes, Katherine, yes"—turning as pale as before—"nothing but truth now and for ever."

Katherine hastened to say a few words to allay the anxiety of Rose, and to fetch

her own bonnet and shawl, before she pursued Nigel. She then walked leisurely, being unwilling to give an air of breathless haste to her endeavours to win him back.

She walked for some distance without finding him. At length she perceived him seated on the trunk of a tree, at the furthest end of Mr. Dacre's property. Anne's letter was still in his hand, but his attitude was no longer one of passion or dejection. It was meditative, but firm and resolved.

Mr. Dacre's grounds were not well kept, and long before Katherine reached him he heard the sound of her steps rustling among the fallen October leaves. As she approached, he came forward to meet her.

"Thank you for coming," he said, courteously enough, though with a calm-

ness that boded no good. "Has Anne recovered?"

"Yes, she is gone home. I feel, Nigel, that you have reason to complain, and great reason to ask for explanation; and I come to give it, if you will hear me."

"I am perfectly ready to hear," he said, gravely. "I trust I shall never be so unjust as to refuse a hearing. After reading that letter, however,"—and he returned Anne's into her hand,—“there can be little to say that I can care to hear.”

"I think there is," Katherine said, quietly. And in a simple and straightforward manner she then proceeded to give him the whole history, not only of the facts of the case, but, as far as she knew them, of Anne's struggles, beginning from the date of Mr. Hope's breakfast.

He listened in silence ; giving her no assistance by questioning, yet, by evident serious interest, leading her on to speak forcibly and from her heart.

When she paused, somewhat breathless, at last, with her tale and her anxiety, he held out his hand to her and said, kindly, "Thank you, Katherine; you have relieved my mind. I feared that I should be unable to respect any longer where I have much respected, and it was painful to me; but I acquit you not only of any deception towards me, but of any thought which the most fastidious, which even I, who would have all clear and pure as the day-light, could disapprove."

They walked a few steps in silence, and then he said, "As to Anne,"—he paused again, and again they walked on;

then again he began—"As to Anne, you may naturally be anxious to hear my decision. I think it best not to keep you in suspense, and therefore I tell you at once, and plainly, that all is over between us."

"Oh! Nigel!" Katherine exclaimed, forgetting "the dignity of woman," in pity for her sister's misery.

"What would you say, Katherine?" he asked kindly, but coldly.

"I would only say *consider*; you know not what you do."

"I have ceased to love her. Would you have me marry when I no longer love?"

"Perhaps you deceive yourself. You may find it out too late."

"No, Katherine. I am so formed, that

when I have no trust, I cannot love. I am not like the world in general. Beauty and grace are nothing to me, if the moral nature is stained. Anne has deceived me; even you, Katherine, cannot know how completely and wilfully deceived. My trust is utterly gone, and with my trust my love. Arguments are vain. It is useless for you to urge me to relent."

"You need not fear them," Katherine said, with involuntary haughtiness. "With all her faults, and I own they have been great towards you, Anne is too precious a gift to press on any man."

"I thought so once." And there was a shade of agitation in his manner. "You should feel for me, Katherine, that I have been undeceived."

"I do, with all my heart."

After this reply, they walked very nearly to the house in silence; he then spoke again, and his manner was again hurried and agitated. "I shall write to Mr. Dacre, Katherine; but I shall say nothing of what has occurred. I leave all that to you. You must break off the marriage, and give what reason you please."

"It must be the truth, then," Katherine replied. "The truth is better than vague suspicions."

"Be it so. I may be blamed, but I care very little for the world's blame."

Katherine stood unconsciously absorbed in thought. His words, "I may be blamed," brought before her some of the probable evils to her sister's position. A man is rarely the one blamed in such matters.

323 KATHERINE AND HER SISTERS.

Even if the ~~woman~~ speaks of blame to him, ~~suspicion~~ in thought follows the woman.

While she reflected, Nigel suddenly seized her hand. "Goodbye, Katherine, and God bless you all. I shall not soon" He broke off, and pressed his eyes tightly together. When he began again it was in a more formal wise. "Before I leave the country, I shall write to Anne, as well as to Mr. Dacre; but, I suppose, this will be the last time we shall meet. Goodbye. Give my love to Rose. I will not go in."

"Yes, Nigel, but you must go in," Katherine said, steadily. "You must not go without seeing Anne again."

"Why should I see her?" he asked, quickly.

"Because it is more just and right. If

it is indeed true that you love her no longer, there is no question but that you had better part; but, if you must part, part in peace. Do not let the memory of that last painful scene haunt her all her life long."

"I think you are right," Nigel said, after a moment's consideration. "I will see her again; but it must be *now*, and in *your* presence, on those conditions."

"As you please," Katherine said. "Come in here, and I will fetch her."

She threw open the window of the dining-room and beckoned him in; then passed through another door to the school-room.

She found Anne sitting up, and leaning her head on her hands.

"Nigel is gone?" she exclaimed, as Katherine appeared.

"No, Annie, not gone yet ; but going, I fear."

"I knew it," Anne said, crossing her hands on her lap, and again drooping her head in silent despair.

"But he will see you first. I am come to fetch you. Dear Annie, rouse yourself. Be open, and humble, and yet brave ; and all may yet be well."

Anne fixed her eyes upon her to drink in hope from her countenance ; but Katherine's expressive face, though far from dejected, was not cheerful—was anxious ; and Anne gathered little there to encourage her. She rose, however, with quiet resolution.

Katherine desired her to wait while she flew for a brush and some rose water ; with the one she refreshed her sister's tear-stained

face, and with the other smoothed and arranged her disordered hair.

Having drawn her curls aside, with some innocent art, in a mode that was very becoming to Anne's features, she turned away to lay down the brush; when she looked back she perceived, and almost smiled at her own disappointment as she perceived, that Anne, ever careless of appearances, had, with one movement, undone her work; tucking her disordered curls, in childish fashion, behind her ears.

When, however, on entering the dining-room, she glanced at her again, she owned that the artless and unstudied simplicity of her air and appearance, not only compensated for the loss of a more careful toilette, but was, in fact, more likely to plead for her than the studied fashion of her own arrangements.

• When the door closed, Katherine withdrew into a window. Anne stood leaning on the back of a chair, with humble, cast-down eyes; and Nigel, at a distance, contemplated her.

That he was touched by her appearance was evident, for his countenance, which had been drawn up into rigidity, softened; he advanced a few steps towards her, and said, "Katherine wished me to see you, Anne. Have you anything to say to me?"

"Forgive me for the wrong I have done you," she said, tremulously.

"The wrong!" he cried, in some passion; a tone far more hopeful to Katherine than the calm and reasoning tone he had before assumed. "Do you call it the wrong? She racks my heart; she destroys my peace; she shivers to pieces all my best hopes in

life; and then she talks of the wrong! Oh! Anne, you little know what you have done to me."

"Forgive me," she cried again; but now in tones passionate as his own. "Oh! Nigel, I have wronged you, I know, but it was my weakness, and not my will." Large tears, as she spoke, rolled from her eyes, and fell, with a heavy sound, on the seat of the leather chair on which she leant.

Nigel was moved; the severe judge, the inexorable censor for the moment disappeared, and the lover, jealous for his love, took his place.

"Oh! Anne," he said, stepping yet nearer, and bending towards her, "say that you never loved him, and all shall be forgiven."

But this was a subject on which Anne's

persuasion was immovable, and, with spirit and dignity, she said, "No, Nigel, I cannot say that. I did not deceive him, any more than I have, *in that point*, deceived you."

"But you deceived yourself," was on Katherine's lips; but the words were restrained; it was not for her to rebuke Anne's truth.

Nigel drew back, mortified, angry, and ashamed of his unsuccessful appeal. "It would have been as well to have been always as careful of deception towards me," he said, coldly, and even with contempt. And for the first time Katherine felt that the case was indeed hopeless.

A silence followed, which Anne could not, Katherine would not, and Nigel did not break. Perhaps if Anne had thrown herself in penitence before him, perhaps the

sight of beauty in tears and at his feet might, even then, have softened him; but Anne's unconquerable timidity and retiring modesty made either violent self-defence or passionate appeal impossible to her. She stood leaning on the chair, like one paralyzed by his contemptuous words, and the precious moments flitted by, and in vain.

Nigel spoke, at last, approaching Katherine. "This is only painful to us all, Katherine; the sooner it is over the better. I came because it was your wish; and as all that can be said has been said, I suppose you are now satisfied?"

"I wished, for your sake, as well as Anne's, that you should part as friends, and not as enemies. I have no wish to keep you longer," she replied, quietly.

"Then goodbye." He shook hands with

her; then, pressing his lips together, went towards Anne, also with his hand out. "That we part friends, Anne," he said, "it would be a mockery to say; but I hope it is not in enmity; so far, at least, as I am concerned, I forgive, or will try to do so." He took her cold, passive hand in his, and held it for an instant; but the action had no warmth; it chilled instead of rousing her. She felt Nigel loved her no more, and the conviction ran like ice into her veins. When he let go her hand, he coldly said to Katherine, "I shall write to Mr. Dacre." And, with a quiet bow, and a stately step, he stepped from the window into the garden, and disappeared.



1



